

THE BRIDGE TABLE

A Love Story

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*“I have greatly enjoyed reading the history
of Beth El that you have written.
You have captured so many of the
small and large moments about which
I had not known,
from the story of each Torah
to the first celebrations to the detailed lists
of all the people who made the success
of Beth El a reality.”
--Rabbi Judy Schindler*

The Bridge Table

A love story

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In the beginning

We were there

Temple Beth El in Charlotte is today the largest Jewish congregation in the two Carolinas. Its rabbi is the leading female minister among 700 churches, temples and mosques in our beautiful city of almost one million people. Temple Beth El began with a few dedicated families in 1942, struggled for survival and grew dramatically with its host city.

Today it has passed in size the conservative synagogue from which it sprang. It has enjoyed impressive building expansions within America's unique Jewish enclave, Shalom Park, encompassing more than 50 acres of Jewish activities inside the Charlotte city limits.

All this had a beginning. Strangely the two of us, Elizabeth and Walter Klein, were there through it all, first separately and then together, from the very beginning to this moment of writing the singular story of how it all happened.

In writing this book about the birth and growth of one Jewish congregation, I am doing so from a good memory and hard data I have saved and assembled. There are few footnotes or attributions to original sources to share with you because Elizabeth's and my first-hand knowledge is, in fact, the sole living original source.

My wife is the daughter of Arthur Goodman, who conceived and organized Temple Beth El. As a high school teenager, she was in the living room of her home when the first meeting took place. It was she who first came up with the name for the congregation. Her mother Katherine was there, too.

After I arrived at Morris Field with the 46th Bomb Group of the Air Force, Temple Beth El's first rabbi, Philip Frankel, volunteered his services in the base chapel right across the street from my barracks home and office. (We worked downstairs, lived upstairs, like an old-time Jewish shop.) I'd been attending Temple Agudath Achim services uptown. It was their new rabbi, Elihu Michelson, who told me that Temple Beth El was alive and meeting at Hotel Charlotte.

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Preface

You find yourself approaching this wondrous place where God and people meet. You are among a thousand families who care about each other and about their faith.

You feel timeless when you approach the Ark to rediscover God's works and words, so life can be all that was intended for you.

Come. Let us walk together into the Temple.

*

The first copies of *The Bridge Table* are on their way to URJ President Eric Yoffie, HUC-JIR President David Ellenson, CCAR President Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus, Retired HUC-JIR President Fred Gottschalk, Rabbi Judith Schindler of Temple Beth El—and Dr. Gary P. Zola.

Gary Zola is Executive Director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. That institution is the world's largest catalogued collection of documentary evidence on the history of American Judaism. It is the most important research center for Jewish study in the United States.

It was founded by Rabbi Jacob Rader Marcus, 1886-1995, a close friend of Temple Beth El in Charlotte over many of his 99 years. It is a high honor to visit his free-standing research center situated on the Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Elizabeth and I have put this book together for all those great leaders of Reform, first and foremost. For it is they and the Jacob Rader Marcus Center that we ultimately trust with the very continuum of our beloved Temple Beth El of Charlotte. In the hands of our Reform leadership, historians, scholars and educators who gather there, this comprehensive information may prove worthy of examination now and in years to come.

We would hope that the Reform Jewish families of Temple Beth El and the Carolinas might enjoy it and learn from it. You will soon notice that our hearts are in this; it is a love story.

The vision

The vision of Temple Beth El took shape at his folding bridge table. Charlotte's lone Jewish lawyer spent Sunday mornings seated awkwardly in the living room of his Providence Road home. After reading the front and editorial pages of *The Charlotte Observer*, Arthur Goodman scanned the real estate listings. That is how he managed tough times when legal fees alone just weren't enough for him and his family. He would spot a piece of property—he called it “propity” in his Tidewater Virginia accent—worthy of visiting and perhaps investing. His instincts were deep and his experience wide as he traded up real estate within his mental marketplace.

He tore out tiny ads, never fearing he might easily lose those half-inch-by-two-inch listings.

One such clipping became Temple Beth El. Another became The Amity Club, which became the Jewish Community Center.

He envisioned new Jewish institutional structures rising on those sites that could help Mecklenburg's 90 families grow into a strong religious community of thousands.

He ruminated over the ways he might reach out to friends and relatives to share his ideas and passion. An unlikely spot next to McAlpine Creek on Providence Road might become the site of the first Reform sanctuary, after it outgrew Hotel Charlotte and the loft over Dowtin's food store. Unproductive acreage on Sharon-Amity Road could be just the place for a Jewish sports, social and recreation center, a wondrous place where Jewish children could get to know each other, play safely, and grow up to marry and establish new Jewish families in Charlotte.

Both locations were close to his home. He drove to them again and again as he pictured buildings and development. He tried not to think about multi-story structures whose upper and lower levels he might never be able to see because of his wartime injury.

He was wise to choose the Providence Road site for a brand-new Temple Beth El.

Hundreds of commuters would have to drive past it twice a day on the way to work and home, people of influence who would be positively and repeatedly impressed with the commitment of Jewish citizens to the future of this city Goodman chose as home.

Enthusiasm for their own new Reform temple grew quickly among such pioneer members as Dick Blumenthal, Harry Frohman, Larry Madalia, Ed Sigal, Hilbert Fuerstman, Hermann Cohen, Joe Boyarsky, Paul Stewart, Ben Jaffa, Milton Mann, Lew Bernstein, Simeon “Happy” Schloss, Leo Gottheimer, Maurice Neiman, Max Kahn, Alex Kohn, Dave Silvers, Julian Cone, Adolph “Sonny” Melasky, Jay Schrader, Aaron Mayer, Irving Tarnopol, Dave Nabow—and their families.

Goodman selected The Amity Club as the name of the social institution for Charlotte Jews ready for their own club after all-too-frequent rejections. (Goodman was never rejected by any club; he and his brother Lookie were early members of the Charlotte Country Club.) He named it after the street where he found the property, Sharon-Amity Road. He recruited twelve Jewish war veterans* to contribute \$100 each for the \$1,200 needed to secure the acreage.

My brother-in-law, Arthur Goodman, Jr., Aaron Orenstein, Howard Schwartz, Herman Blumenthal and I were among them. It was to be the first place Charlotte Jews had for recreation since the tiny pre-war Progressive Club upstairs on East Morehead Street near South Tryon.

Goodman told us all we could have time to put together the full \$6,000 to buy the land. He would find others who would sign up to fund a much larger amount that would give Charlotte-area Jews their own dining room, swimming pool, game tables, tennis courts, maybe even a golf course.

There would be no membership restrictions, no conditions to bar them from enjoying a Jewish social life they imagined. It sounded like a dream. We all wished it would come true.

**Banded as the Baker-Usilowitz Chapter of the Jewish War Veterans, named after the only two Charlotte veterans who did not come home alive in World War Two. Compare this to 13 names listed on the monument to dead Confederate Jewish soldiers in Charlotte's Hebrew Cemetery.*

Good things can happen in wartime

It so happened that the Morris Field base chapel sat right across the street from my base--a barracks room for three Air Force sergeants.

The steeple on that chapel told me it wasn't for me or other Jews stationed there in 1944. Then one day I heard that a rabbi had volunteered to lead services there early Friday nights. This I had to see.

His Sabbath observance didn't resemble those I experienced at sanctuaries in Newark and East Orange, NJ, or at UNC Chapel Hill. His fervor fixated on the war, the war our world was waging against Hitler and his nazis. That GI pulpit was for Philip Frankel a door to the minds and hearts of the only young Jewish men in uniform then stationed in Charlotte, except for a recruiting station.

Maybe ten or twelve airmen showed up at first. Then the total grew smartly as town Jewish girls discovered where the action was. The base movie theater was close by, so there you are. Good things indeed happen in wartime.

If Rabbi Frankel announced he was now leading a new Reform congregation in the city, I don't know. First thing I did remember about Temple Beth El was walking from Temple Agudath Achim with Rabbi A. Elihu Michelson and his wife to their home after Conservative-Orthodox services before I boarded the bus back to my Morris Field barracks-office.

They were a devoted, devout couple intrigued by this 19-year-old Reform soldier seeking others of his faith. "What congregation did you attend in New Jersey?" I answered B'nai Jeshurun in Newark where the eminent Solomon Foster reigned. "You're Reform, all right," they commented and then they said, "There's a new Reform group meeting now at Hotel Charlotte."

I dated sweet girls who popped up at Morris Field services but spotted none at Temple Agudath Achim. I did get to meet Blanche and Ben Jaffa, my future wife's aunt and uncle there. But there was no hint of what was about to happen.

'These wartime marriages never last'

That was a popular saying in Charlotte, indeed nationwide, as soldiers met, loved, married. Elizabeth Goodman and I suddenly found ourselves players in this lively game.

It was Christmas night, December 25, 1944. I volunteered to lead a 2½-ton truck loaded with airmen

from our outfit, the 46th Bomb Group, from Morris Field to the Armory Auditorium next to Central High. Around 300 town girls in their prettiest predatory dresses were already there dancing with soldiers to Fleet Green and His Orchestra, enjoying fortune-telling and doing the cookies-and-lemonade thing.

As I circulated I noticed a very cute teen girl dancing with Uri I. Shabalin. Now Uri was a friend of mine who worked at 46th Bomb Group headquarters downstairs in our barracks across from the base chapel. Uri was a Russian boy in America who volunteered in the Air Force as I had. His English wasn't great (he'd say, "...QRS2UVW...") but he was a good fellow far from his home on the Volga.

So here was Uri with this *lovely* girl in his arms, dancing offbeat in his GI boots, right under my nose. I cut in and rescued her. My world quickly entered Phase Two.

Turned out I had decided *not* to meet this very girl during her Thanksgiving break when my Air Force buddy Al Heller invited me to join him at the home of fellow lawyer Arthur Goodman and wife Katherine. Their daughter Elizabeth had been there with three of her Jewish friends from Woman's College in Greensboro. I told Al thanks-but-no-thanks. It was raining and I was in no mood for small talk with four giggly college girls.

Now as Elizabeth and I danced, we laughed realizing I was the soldier who didn't show up at her home a month earlier. We quickly discovered mutual friends. That we were both Reform Jews. We talked like new old friends. Our hearts were beating in unison. This was *it*.

We danced close, talked with her parents who were watching the dancing, then broke to get our fortunes told. The palm reader noted solemnly we were born exactly six months apart. She coldly announced we were not meant for each other. One week later I proposed in her parlor. Elizabeth had paged through my little notebook filled with "I love you" scribbles I showed her. I asked The Question and she quietly nodded Yes. Later, as our four children, eight grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren were born, we smiled whenever we remembered the palm reader's not-all-that-accurate prediction.

Days later I learned that it was Elizabeth's father who had founded Temple Beth El.

Let's call it, 'Temple Beth El'

Sixteen-year-old Elizabeth Hofeller Goodman uttered those words at a meeting in her family living room at 3001 Providence Road. Her Dad, lawyer Arthur Goodman, had called it to see if the time was right to start a new Reform congregation in Charlotte. The group was hand-picked and ready. Beloved Rabbi Bill Greenburg had nourished the small, diverse group of Jews called Agudath Achim, Hebrew United Brotherhood, for many pleasant years in Charlotte. But an auto accident disabled his wife Beck and they moved back to Pennsylvania.

And who was selected as his successor? Why, no other than A. Elihu Michelson, my friend with whom I walked home Friday nights, who welcomed the Reform-minded members of his congregation to pray with him, but only on his orthodox terms.

After voting to establish a new congregation, the living room group asked, what shall we call it? Elizabeth recalled the name of the oldest Jewish congregation in Buffalo, where she spent summers visiting her grandmother Nanny, aka Adella Hofeller Cohen. It had been founded May 9, 1847, by twelve men as the first synagogue in Buffalo and western New York.

The teen's suggestion was approved. Temple Beth El it would be.

And still is, two-thirds of a century later.

The name, meaning Home of God, is sacred historically as well as religiously. According to *Encyclopedia Judaica*, it goes back 5,000 years to identify a Canaanite and Israelite town 10½ miles north of Jerusalem, at the intersection of the north-south mountain road along the watershed and the east-west road leading to the plains of Jericho and to the Coastal Plain.

Scholar Harry Orlinsky noted that our Holy Scriptures disagree with themselves about the origin of the town Beth El. Traditional Beth El's main importance is associated with Jacob's dream in Genesis 35. Fleeing from his brother Esau, Jacob spent the night there and dreamed he saw a ladder reaching to heaven with angels of God ascending and descending it. Then God spoke to Jacob assuring him protection and confirming the promise that the land on which he rested would be given to him and his descendants. "And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He spoke with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink offering thereon, and poured oil thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Beth El."

World events on Beth El's first day

To put your mind in the proper time frame, here are newspaper headlines published December 11, 1942, the day of Temple Beth El's first Sabbath service at Hotel Charlotte:

ITALIAN 8TH ARMY ALMOST COMPLETELY DECIMATED
MANSTEIN ORDERS GENERAL PAULUS TO BREAK OUT OF ENCIRCLEMENT
GENERAL SCHMIDT CONVINCES PAULUS NOT TO DISOBEY HITLER'S ORDERS
GENERAL HOTH'S ATTACK TOWARD STALINGRAD SLOWS NEAR MYSHKOVA
ON GUADALCANAL U.S.FORCES MEETING HEAVY RESISTANCE
IN NEW GUINEA ALLIES TAKE CAPE ENDIADERE
AUSTRALIAN TROOPS GET NEWLY ARRIVED TANKS TO ATTACK JAP POSITIONS
BRISK ENGAGEMENT AT NOFILIA IN NORTH AFRICA

What else was going on when Temple Beth El was born?

It was one year after Pearl Harbor. The US had put 110,000 Japanese-Americans in detention camps. Britain and the US invaded North Africa. *Oklahoma* opened on Broadway. Pearl Buck published *The Good Earth*. The favorite movie was *The Gang's All Here* with Alice Faye, Benny Goodman and Carmen Miranda. Detroit was the scene of race riots. President Roosevelt signed the pay-as-you-go income tax bill and withholding began.

And in Charlotte, flight crews were learning to pilot, navigate and gun A-20s, B-25s and A-26s. More than a few were killed in crashes around Charlotte. Jewelry stores were flourishing as thousands of servicemen overloaded Trade and Tryon streets every off-duty hour. They were driven to buy something for that girl or mother back home. Buses full of soldiers flowed in and out the West Trade street station. Troop trains operated 24/7. Beer with 3.2% alcohol was the drink *du jour*. The Barringer and Charlotte hotels were booked solid. So were pathetic old rooming houses. Walking streets and watching planes at Morris Field were the things to do in a city many visitors and locals considered a bore. Complainers heard

that conditions were much worse in nearby military towns like Fayetteville, Columbia, Greensboro and Goldsboro. Weekend swimming at Municipal, Willamette and Suttle pools was something to look forward to, even when the water was bright green. Myers Park and Eastover were the nicest neighborhoods. Biddleville near the city center was the worst, jammed with shotgun houses.* Renting a house or apartment was worse than impossible. Food and gas rationing were in force. You had to bribe butchers. But hell, there was a war on, right?

People promised themselves never to stand in line again after the war. Movie theaters (“picture shows”) were packed. Blue laws were in effect; Ivey’s shuttered their window displays on Sunday.

Hard to believe that all this looked pretty good to thousands of boys from somewhere else who got to thinking about marrying and settling in Charlotte after the war.

I was one of them.

** Not until President Eisenhower spoke at Freedom Park May 18, 1954, at 2:40PM, 11 years after the advent of Temple Beth El, did Charlotte wake up to the embarrassment of its black living conditions. The president’s entourage was re-routed to prevent his seeing hundreds of white-owned, black-rented shotgun houses. Only after that were they all torn down.*

Temple Beth El was the product of Masons, including its founder, first president and first rabbi

Freemasonry is the world’s largest and oldest fraternity. North Carolina has always been a strong Masonic state. One of North Carolina’s 370 Masonic lodges of today was formed by Governor Zebulon Vance in 1867: Excelsior 261 in Charlotte. *Literally 50% of its founding members were Jewish rather than the usual 2%.* Its first Master, Samuel Wittkowsky, was Jewish. It was to become the largest Masonic lodge in North Carolina history with more than one thousand members.

Seventy-five years would pass before another such phenomenon took place.

That was in 1942 when Arthur Goodman, a Mason raised in Virginia in Elizabeth Lodge who later demitted to Charlotte’s Phalanx Lodge, conceived and founded Temple Beth El. He called upon six leaders to be members of the founding team: Adolph J. “Sonny” Melasky. Maurice Neiman. Alex Kohn. Ben Jaffa. Leo Gottheimer. Milton Mann. *All were Masons.* The next year Rabbi Philip Frankel was retained as the first full time rabbi. *He, too, was a Mason.* Though he’d been ordained for eight years, this would be his first pulpit.

Do not miss the point! The reason Arthur Goodman called on brother Masons to found a new Reform temple in Charlotte was not simply that they were worthy friends who perceived a common need.

It was a matter of *trust*. Goodman knew he could rely on his Masonic brothers to lead and perform with absolute reliability. It was the same when the founding fathers of our nation looked to many brother Masons to lead it. It was the same when the Emperor of Brazil rescued escaping Confederate Masonic soldiers to give his country agricultural prosperity and his brother Masons a new life.

It was a matter of *quality*. Goodman knew the Masonic Order consisted of educated, articulate, bright, professional and deeply religious men of all faiths, at all levels of life—always there to help.

It was a matter of *numbers*. If Goodman was going to organize a new synagogue after years of dry efforts, he was going to want a minyan every Shabbat. (To non-Jewish readers, minyan means a religious quorum consisting of ten males, 13 or older. That says they can pray any time, any place, with or without a rabbi.) Between Phalanx 31 and Excelsior 261 Masonic lodges in Charlotte, there was a minyan resource.

If you mistakenly think the minyan principle is a quaint nicety in Judaism, consider Commodore Uriah Levy. This magnificent American Jewish Naval hero of the War of 1812 was taken captive by the British and thrown into Dartmoor Prison in England. He and eight other Jews rotted for months there unable, in their mindset, to daven. When finally a tenth Jew was taken prisoner and put behind bars with Levy and the rest, the celebration was like the shot heard 'round the world.

And it was a matter of *cooperation*. There were many Masons who remained faithful to Temple Israel (then Temple Agudath Achim) when Beth El was born: Morris Speizman, Dick Blumenthal, Al Smith, Al Kossove, Harry Schwartz, Phil Naumoff, Sam Goldfein and Isadore Silverstein. These brethren were supportive of the movement to establish a Reform congregation independent of their own.

Now fast-forward 55 years to December 12, 1997, as Temple Beth El made faith history with North Carolina's first religious service honoring the close bonds between Judaism and Masonry. Grand Master Gerry T. Smith traveled from Morehead City, just after the death of his beloved son, to be the guest of honor and address a packed house, consisting largely of Jewish Masons from Charlotte and their families. Among other leading North Carolina Masons who attended were Deputy Grand Master Thomas W. Gregory, Past Grand Masters Walter F. McCall and Bunn T. Phillips, Jr., Scottish Rite officers Alex H. Binnick, Judge David B. Sentelle of the US Court of Appeals from Washington, James Weisel, Jr. and Donald L. Williams.

Governor James G. Martin, the state's most famous Mason, came to deliver the key address from our pulpit. His remarks appear in full below. Temple Beth El's rabbi, Jim Bennett, whose father and grandfather were Masons, hosted the event. But the president of the congregation, Norman Levin, could not make it to greet the governor at the history-making service. Copies of the historic program were placed outside the sanctuary but were removed the following day. To recognize its 10th anniversary in December, 2007, Rabbi Judy Schindler was asked to observe the historic event in some way but could not schedule it.

The Blumenthal family, headed by brothers Dick and Herman, nourished Temple Beth El with leadership and funds through the generations. Both were members of Phalanx 31 Masonic lodge in Charlotte. Gladys Kahn Lavitan taught religious school youngsters at Beth El and Beth Shalom *for 55 years*. Her cousin was Berl Maurice Kahn, member of Wayne 112 Masonic lodge in Goldsboro. He became the first and only Jewish Grand Master of Masons in the history of North Carolina, the 119th out of 157, serving in 1972 and 1973.

Charlotte Jewish Past Masters of Masonic lodges include Samuel Wittkowsky, Samuel Goldfein, Harry L. Schwartz, Arnold Kridel, Warren Binnick, Harold Kossove, Richard A. Klein and Herman Ziegler.

Masonic presidents of Temple Beth El and Congregation Beth Shalom have included Herman Blumenthal, Sidney Kosch, Walter J. Klein and Richard A. Klein. Ziggy Hurwitz, a member of Temple Beth El, composed and arranged a body of music for the Charlotte Valley of the Scottish Rite of Masonry. One of Charlotte's most beloved Masons was Joseph Charles Boyarsky. He and wife Nell were regulars at services for many years. Joe became a Scottish Rite Mason November 27, 1941. After his death his family gave to Temple Beth El Joe's precious Masonic box designed and carved by his father-in-law, Henry

Cunningham Reese. Nell was a sister of Emma Reese Quinn, mother of Moira Quinn Klein, who might well become President of Temple Beth El.

Here is the address former North Carolina Governor James G. Martin gave that historic night of December 12, 1997, at Temple Beth El, from his original document, later published in the February, 1998, issue of *The American Jewish Times Outlook*:

“Rabbi James Bennett, President Norman Levin and the Congregation of Temple Beth El; Most Worshipful Gerry Smith, Grand Master of Masons of North Carolina, and the Masonic delegations from our Fraternal Lodges and Temples:

“Ladies and gentlemen: You must understand what an honor is mine to have been asked to address you this evening on the subject of the common bonds shared by Freemasons and the Jewish people. It is enough that Brother Walter Klein would extend to me the invitation of Temple Beth El, which could only be accepted. Your leadership in the religious, social, moral and business growth of this community commands respect and obedience. So I thank you.

“This is not an idle topic. Nor can it be adequately characterized as ‘interesting’ or even as merely ‘historically significant.’ No, my friends, this invitation came to me as a vital subject of *holy* proportions, and it was time for me to learn about, and then speak about, ‘Freemasonry and Judaism.’

“You will have examined already the program printed for this important occasion, and have begun to wonder and marvel at the prominence of those being honored upon this service of Shabbat evening worship. Even more compelling is the roster of those who have provided great leadership in both the Jewish Temple and the Masonic Lodge. Yet, there is so much more. It will not be necessary for me to recite all or most of what is written there, and I ask that its text be part of any permanent record of this evening. It is profound in and of itself.

“There you will learn that the majority of the founders of Temple Beth El were Masons. There the names are recorded of eleven Masons who have served as presidents of this Temple or of Temple Israel. There, as well, are the prominent Jewish leaders who served as Masters of their Lodge, here in Charlotte, beginning with the legendary Samuel Wittkowsky, whose consummate gifts to the City have their lasting reflection in the great generosity of so many Jewish families of our day. And Jews were prominent among the founders of our earliest Masonic Lodges, in colonial Rhode Island, Charleston, Savannah, New York and elsewhere.

“You will be interested to see that Freemasonry was a reflective part of the lives of such immortals as Irving Berlin and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, whose Masonic petition I have seen on display in Salzburg. Even among us tonight there are so many stories of the combined importance of religion and the moral teachings of Freemasonry that have recurred in life and life, again and again. Many US presidents have been Masons, beginning with George Washington, who laid the cornerstone of the US Capitol in accordance with Masonic ritual. Most who signed the US Constitution were Masons.

“Let me tell you this about the Order of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons. Ancient, because we derive our teachings from ancient and abiding truths. Free, because we uphold freedom of thought and association against authoritarianism. Accepted, as deserving of that respect for all Brothers. And Masons, because we base so many of our lessons (for building lives and families) upon the traditions and symbolism of master builders. Upon completion of the lessons and ritual of the first three degrees, one becomes a Master Mason. Later there are opportunities to progress through an additional 29 degrees of instruction

(for a total of 32), either through the Scottish Rite or the York Rite bodies, after which one is eligible for advancement to the Shrine Temple. There is also a 33rd degree which is supremely honorary.

“Our study this evening examines the rich, reflective literature embodying the many ties, symbols, ritual elements and meaning which Freemasonry has derived from Judaism.

Masonic literature and lessons are filled with Jewish history, traditions and, most important, religion. Please understand that Masonry is not a religion. Nor does it promote any particular religion. However its greatest themes are religious in origin and context. Masonic instruction draws important lessons from many of the world’s great religions and their most profound philosophies. The greatest of these are based upon Judaism and the fabulous stories of Jewish life and work and perseverance.

“Masonry respects and honors the relationship of each individual Mason in his faith in God, and does seek to reinforce that faith, never to undermine it. All men and all religions are on the same level. Now and then we have to endure the taunts of some cult leader, trying to build his own following by attacking Masonry as ‘anti-Christian.’ Now that must sound familiar to students of Jewish history, from whom we have learned a great deal about endurance. How can we be anti-Christian when many of us are devout Christian? We can not be anti-religious in any way. Perhaps the criticism comes because we are tolerant of the variety of forms and beliefs of religions, which enable different people to find a trusting and uplifting relationship with God.

“Your religion comes first, as part of your own free thought and choice, as does mine. What Masonry does is to build upon your religion a firmer moral understanding and discipline. Masonry, in its essence, employs religious philosophy and stories to help men become better and wiser. Yes, we learn from many religions, because there is so much to learn. We don’t embarrass or demean any religion. Masons may be sectarian, Masonry is not. It is likely that this ideal, striving for religious morality through respect and toleration, is what has attracted so many Jews to Masonry down through the years. Christians, too. Those who seek to impose their religion upon others will find little comfort in Masonry. Perhaps that explains some that attack and misrepresent us.

“I will not tell you that we have been models of purity and perfection. Human nature is still vibrant within us, and we struggle with our nature. There are frequent examples of discrimination within our ranks. You would disbelieve me if I told you otherwise. So we must return often to our higher ideals, or restrain our baser nature.

“That struggle is part of how we build, just as rough, irregular stones must be hewn patiently by the master stone mason. Let me illustrate this with some serious, if painful, history. Modern Freemasonry emerged in 1717 from the Craft halls of London, which had formed to train apprentices, but also to preserve secrecy of the building trades, so as to limit access. Soon this spread to Holland, France and Germany. By mid-18th century, there were Orders of Freemasonry in most countries of Europe and the United States, later in Canada, Egypt and Palestine, and more recently in Israel. Each had its own national Grand Lodge to oversee the integrity of the operations and the ritual presentation of each local unit, and to control the founding of new lodges.

“For a while, Jews were welcomed to join and participate fully. By the late 18th century, the suspicions and rivalries of human nature led to objections against Jewish membership. In only one country did this contentiousness grow to the point of refusing entrance to Jews. Guess which one. Interestingly, in Germany, lodges in 1780 began to close their doors to Jews, even if they were initiated in other countries

and properly vouched for. This was the cause of the great and heated dispute. During the Napoleonic occupation, the Grand Lodge of France established lodges in Germany, open to Jewish members. This, of course, hardened the resistance within the older Prussian lodges.

“In 1836 the Grand Lodge of Amsterdam vigorously protested the refusal of the Grand Lodge of Germany to admit any Dutch Masons who were of the Jewish faith. They were joined by lodges from England, France and New York. Internally, efforts were unsuccessful to return to the English constitution, which prohibited the attachment of Masonry to any religion. By 1876 many German lodges had majorities favoring admission of Jewish members, but only a few raised the requisite two-thirds. Such reform movements soon collapsed in a wave of anti-Semitism during Bismarck’s Reich. This whole debate also got caught up in another dispute whether Freemasonry was essentially humanistic or a Christian institution, as *some* Christian zealots argued. All this, in a struggle to capture a system based on brotherly love and religious toleration, for the contrary purposes of exclusion and doctrinaire thought-control.

“By this time, both Jews and Freemasons, especially the humanistic variety, were being accused in some circles of undermining traditional society. The suspicion of some sinister alliance between the two even figured in the celebrated Dreyfus Affair. Then in 1904 there appeared (first in Russia) something entitled, ‘The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,’ which appeared to allege a Jewish-Masonic plot to usurp national sovereignty worldwide. That no evidence was ever found made it all the more sinister! This inflamed those who knew how to wield anti-Semitism as an organizing principle for rallying their followers. Then, right after the first World War, ‘the protocols’ were translated into German and English (what a mistake!) whereupon it became patriotic to blame the Jewish-Freemason conspiracy for causing both the outbreak of the war and the German defeat. The rising National Socialist (or nazi) movement quickly seized as their rallying cry, ‘Juden unter Freimauren!’ (‘Jews and Freemasons!’). Bolsheviks, gypsies and homosexuals were also targeted, as you know.

“Ironically, not even the anti-Semitism of the German lodges could save them from its most extreme expression: Adolf Hitler’s totalitarian nazism. There is no parallel to be implied here to suggest that Masons suffered the degree of persecutions, indignities, thefts, deportations and mass murders of the Holocaust. But together we got blamed for a lot. It may well be that the religious fear of Deism and humanism intensified the mentality, which cast a Jewish-Masonic demonology over that one very explosive corner of Europe. Fortunately for us, fraternity and freedom of thought prevailed, but it was ugly. And it took a Second World War to clean it up.

“There is another theme of even longer standing which ties Freemasonry to Judaism. That is the prominence of stories from the Torah, the Talmud and the Old Testament in Masonic rituals. You will understand that I cannot reveal to you the particulars of a secret ritual. To do so apart from the ritual and its process would not do justice to its beauty and coherence, and would trivialize its noblest features. But it is known and freely published that Masonry takes many of its vital lessons from the construction of Solomon’s Temple. There are numerous stories regarding its most conspicuous builders which readily illustrate many important truths and standards of behavior and responsibility. And of error. Beyond that, there’s instruction based on the story of Abraham, the destruction and restoration of Jerusalem, the Babylonian conquest, the Egyptian sojourn. To be sure, there are elements derived from other great religions as well. Indeed, many Christian themes are usefully employed; but the places, terminology, names and symbolism of the Old Testament are especially prominent.

“Why would you suppose it is that Masonic teaching has derived so much from Jewish religion and history and philosophy? Well, for one thing, it’s because there is so much more there. Who has preserved a longer, continuous record of history, with such great names, places and events? What philosophy or civilization today traces its same line back through four thousand years? What other people have preserved their religious and ethnic identity through more epochs of dispersion (Diaspora)? What other nation is more ancient and at the same time more modern? With more kinds of stories to tell how it all happened? And who, in the world, has more clearly revealed God in history? If you sought out to create an idea like Freemasonry, where else would you turn for your most compelling lessons, and your most profound moral instruction?

“Freemasons and Jews. We have looked tonight at a rich texture of individual contributions of Jews who have meant so much to Masonry, founding lodges, building friendships, anchoring its basic moral beliefs. We have seen how Freemasonry is not a religion, but seeks to support and encourage religious faith and practice. We examined the emergence of destructive and contrary doctrines, based on suspicion and hatred, fueled by allegations that sinister conspiracies linked us; and how this pattern of lies led to the most evil conflagration of persecution and conquest and terror of the Third Reich. Through it all, we have seen how great moral traditions have intertwined, from the building of Solomon’s Temple, to the building of America.

“Freemasonry and Judaism. That is our heritage. That is our responsibility. Now, let that be our enduring legacy. *Shabbat shalom!*”

Temple Beth El almost made Masonic history in another way. When Charles Ingram was elected Grand Master of North Carolina Masons, he told me he would like to appoint as Assistant Grand Chaplain a North Carolina rabbi who was a Mason. Our Wilmington rabbi had a fine religious and fraternal record. Unfortunately he was new to North Carolina and so had no active ties to a lodge in this state. Rabbi Gerber sported a Masonic ring for years so I suggested him for the honor. It turned out he hadn’t paid his dues for years and wasn’t a practicing Mason.

Members in uniform: honored or forgotten?

Visitors to synagogues throughout America are familiar with bronze plaques on the walls honoring members who served in the armed forces. No such plaque ever appeared in Temple Beth El of Charlotte, NC.

And yet Adolph L. “Sonny” Melasky, Beth El secretary, saw to it that this congregation gave its returning WWII veterans their first year of membership dues-free, as a way of thanking them. Sonny was born in Bastrop, Texas, east of Austin. His family had lived there before the 1880 census.

Charlotte saw the formation of the Baker-Usilowitz chapter of the Jewish War Veterans (JWV) in 1946. Its 12 members volunteered to contribute the first \$1200 that sealed the deal to establish the city’s Amity Country Club. Other accounts show us doing so to have our own private veterans’ facility, but that is not true. The goal of the veterans was identical to that of Arthur Goodman: a new operation to serve the entire Jewish community of Charlotte.

Temple founder Arthur Goodman suffered a US Navy-connected injury that left him disabled for life. One of his relatives, Major General Moe Goodman, was in charge of the New York Port of Embarkation during WWII. His brother Lookie was the roommate of Hyman Rickover, later father of nuclear-powered ships, while attending the US Naval Academy at Annapolis. His son, Arthur, Jr., who led the very first Beth El service at the age of 16, served in the heat of the battle of Okinawa in the Pacific theater of war. His war medals were on display in the congregation's history display in the chapel for years.

Other Beth El war veterans included Treasurer Paul Stewart, who as Paul Schwartz was decorated for his Pacific service; Herman Blumenthal, Army officer, and Hilbert Fuerstman, Army paratrooper. One can find evidence in the city's Hebrew Cemetery of Jewish military who did not survive the wars.

Beth El joins UAHC; Temple Israel Joins United Synagogue of America

The infant Reform congregation in Charlotte lost little time identifying proudly with its national organization, then named the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, today the Union for Reform Judaism. It joined July 30, 1943. Its certificate was signed by Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath and Executive Chairman Samuel S. Hollander. Over the years Beth El members have served on the Union's board and committees.

During the early 1940s, two Agudath Achim services were being held consecutively during the High Holy Days--one orthodox, the other conservative. With its Reform members flowing into Temple Beth El, and its orthodox members too few to act as a majority, Agudath Achim--Hebrew United Brotherhood--declared itself a religiously conservative congregation in July, 1946, joining the United Synagogue of America and changing its name to Temple Israel.

During its years of independence from Beth El, Congregation Beth Shalom enjoyed full membership in UAHC.

The first memorials

The first building of Temple Beth El needed many objects and services and its members were quickly forthcoming. These were the first memorial gifts, with the names of their donors:

Torah and all temple legal services: Arthur and Katherine Goodman

Ark and paneling: Larry and Irene Madalia, Paul and Eve Stewart

Organ and entrance window: Harry and Phyllis Frohman

Star of David window: Esther and Edward Dobkin

Altar chairs: Judy and Maurice Neiman

Memorial board: Billie and Bertram Raff

Bronze menorahs: Aaron Maer

Eternal light: Julia Kahn

Ten commandments plaques: Hannah and David Silvers, Israel Smith

Vestry draperies: Joseph VanPraagh
Paint supplies: Shirley and Joseph Murnick
Reception table: Dorothy and Leon Gutmann
Second Torah: Evelyn Bernstein
Star symbol on roof: Ethel and Al Goodman

The first wedding

Hilda Malever and her parents Rafe and Hattie were early TBE members. The library in the first temple was donated by Hattie and Hilda Malever.

Hilda and Raymond Kirsner were the first couple to be married at Beth El. The wedding date was October 5, 1950. Within one year Raymond died, followed by her parents. Hilda, a Charlotte beauty, lived out her long life in her home and then at the Methodist Home, always with the love and care of cousins Gerald and Fay Sinkoe.

Earlier Jews in Charlotte

The first Jew to set foot in the Carolinas was Joachim Gaunse in 1585, four centuries ago. With Queen Elizabeth's enthusiastic encouragement, Gaunse came from Prague to what is now North Carolina to work solo for one year studying Tuscarora, Cherokee, Chickasaw and Powhatan tribes in their smelting of iron and copper. Sir Walter Raleigh brought him here and Sir Frances Drake took him home to Prague and fame. He was one of a handful of survivors of the Lost Colony.

Gaunse had reduced smelting time of copper and iron from four months to four *days*. That breakthrough put England far ahead of her adversaries on the high seas. Metal armor on warships gave the British navy defensive power and cannon its offensive power. So this lone Jewish metallurgist handed Queen Elizabeth an iron grip over Europe!

Whether Gaunse reached what is now Charlotte is a matter of conjecture. We know he spent his year traveling from Roanoke Island west to the mountains, stopping at major Indian grounds of several tribes. Just south of today's Charlotte was a then-huge city of 5,000 Catawbans.

Jewish colonists may have lived on the Cape Fear River between 1664 and 1667. Many Jews were in Barbados then and Sir John Yeaman's colonists originated there. We knew Jews did settle there by 1702 because we have records of a protest that "Jews, strangers, sailors, servants, Negroes and others not qualified to vote had been allowed to cast ballots."

Two Jews came to Charlotte to settle in 1783. Abraham Moses and his cousin Solomon Simons van Grol came here after their cotton plantation in Surinam failed. They arrived in time to serve in the Revolutionary War. Moses was a private in 1783 and Simons served in Captain Liggett's company of the local militia. Both names appear in the first American census of 1790. Moses died in 1821 leaving his wife, two daughters, three slaves, \$50 to his brother Isaac in Germany, \$25 to the synagogue in Charleston, \$5 to the Baptist church and \$5 to the Methodist church.

His cousin Solomon fathered a vast Jewish family in and around Charlotte. Today their descendants are named McCall, Cuthbertson, McCauley, Bennett, Robinson, Springer, Rogers, Jones, Dillon—and *Belk*.

Certainly the most important Jew in the American Revolution was Haym Salomon, not wealthy but a miracle worker raising funds to keep our struggle for independence alive. He wasn't a product of the Carolinas but another fiscal whiz, Bernard Baruch, surely was. History tells us he counseled many presidents in the financial management of our nation. He assembled 17,000 oceanfront acres next to his Georgetown, SC, home. At his Hobcaw Barony he was the frequent host to world leaders and advised them as well.

A more recent fiscal genius is Ben Bernanke, head of the Federal Reserve system, from Dillon, SC. In good times and bad, he is considered by some pundits as the second most important person in the US government. His parents, Phillip and Edna Bernanke, brother Seth and sister-in-law Ellen Goldberg, are long-time members of Temple Israel in Charlotte.

Judah Philip Benjamin was all of these: attorney general, secretary of war and secretary of state of the Confederate States of America. Idolized by many but despised by some, he was considered the brains of the southern forces and was dearly loved (her words) by Varina, wife of President Jefferson Davis. He took the blame for war failures that belonged with Davis. Benjamin came to Charlotte to meet with Davis and his cabinet before fleeing south and thence to England where he became queen's counsel. While in Charlotte his host was a fellow Jew, Abram Weil.

To memorialize that meeting, Temple Beth El and Temple Israel in 1948 donated a monument to the NC Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. It stands on South Tryon street between 3rd and 4th streets.

Among the impressive number of Jewish boys who volunteered in Charlotte to fight for the Confederacy was Louis Leon. One of several New York youngsters attracted to jobs in Charlotte at Sam Wittkowsky's dry goods store, he kept a diary. *And what a diary*. It remains a most remarkable Civil War narrative detailing the life of the common foot soldier—a Jewish one at that. He wrote of seeing General Lee grow old, capturing a fellow soldier who deserted and was executed before his eyes, paying 50 cents for a dressed rat as his meat for that week, and walking hundreds of miles through mud and cold to witness ultimate defeat of the south he grew to love. Leon headed the post-war veterans organization in NC, leading a huge final assembly in Charlotte which dedicated the still-standing courthouse-grounds monument to the Mecklenburg Declaration signers.

Wittkowsky was the leading Jew in Charlotte during the 19th century. He climbed from poor Prussian immigrant to the wealthiest person in Mecklenburg, putting his money to work for the public good. He started the first building and loan to finance Charlotte housing, served as alderman, was president of the Board of Trade, founder of the original Charlotte Country Club, came to aid Zeb Vance on the worst day of Zeb's life as he was taken to prison for having served as wartime NC governor, and nurtured Zeb as close friend through his ten years lawyering in Charlotte. His team of New York Jewish teens got his blessing to quit work and fight for the Confederacy, like 3,000 other Jews. All were promised their jobs would be waiting after the war.

Before the Hebrew Cemetery was established, Charlotte Jewish men and women were buried in church cemeteries, their faith respected and duly identified. The section around North Pine and Seventh streets

was the place many early Jews settled, prayed and worked. It was the neighborhood where you would find the Millers, Silversteins and former governor Zeb Vance and family. Other folks named Hirschinger, Schiff, Nathan, Rosenthal and Weill built homes on Church street, in the Elizabeth section and elsewhere.

Historic events

Historic early service

A jewel of a news article has survived to tell us just what was happening at Temple Beth El's fourth service on New Year's night, January 1, 1943, at Hotel Charlotte. This *Charlotte Observer* story the next morning gives us insight into the way candidates for our pulpit position tried out:

"TEMPLE HOLDS PEACE PRAYERS"

"Members of Charlotte's newly organized reformed Hebrew (sic) congregation joined with churches of other faiths and denominations yesterday in pronouncing a special New Year's day prayer for peace and a United Nations victory as well as for the safety of American boys fighting on the far flung battlefields of the world.

"Rabbi Samuel R. Shillman of Temple Sinai, Sumter, S.C., was the guest minister at the regular Friday evening services which were held at the Hotel Charlotte.

"Speaking on 'Judaism and the post-war world,' he said, 'The day is not far distant when armed hostilities will cease. Convinced that right will always triumph over wrong, there is no doubt in our minds that victory will crown the efforts of the United Nations. When this time comes, and it can not come until the total power of free men everywhere overcomes the evil intentions of the perpetrators of international crime, then the Jews will have a definite something to contribute to the world of the future.

"It isn't the helpless, weaponless Jew that Hitler and his company fear,' the rabbi asserted. 'It is the way of life and the prophetic ideals that disturb the Axis leaders. A society fostering discrimination and hate, enslavement of non-Germanic peoples, and the annihilation of sincere religionists can not exist where men uphold the ways of decency, love, justice and righteousness. Both Jews and Christians are thorns in nazi sides because they abhor a return to savagery, inhumanity and the trampling underfoot of freedom and justice.'

"At the conclusion of the services a new congregation was officially organized under the name of Congregation Beth El of Charlotte.

"Temporary officers elected are as follows: president, Leo Gottheimer; vice president, Maurice Neiman; secretary-treasurer, S. A. Schloss; board members, Milton G. Mann, Alex B. Kohn, David Silvers, A. L. Melasky and Max Kahn."

Minutes of January 1, 1943

"The services of Temple Beth El were held Friday night, January 1, 1943, in the Tryon Room of the Hotel Charlotte with Rabbi Samuel R. Shillman of Sumter conducting the ritual. After the services were over, a business meeting was held for the organization of the congregation with Rabbi Shillman presiding.

"Motion was made by Mrs. Maurice Neiman and duly seconded that the name of the congregation be called Beth El and that it be duly organized. This was unanimously carried.

“Rabbi Shillman stated that the next order of business would be the election of temporary officers to conduct and carry on the business of the congregation.

“Motion was made which was duly seconded and unanimously carried that Mr. Leo Gottheimer be named temporary president.

“Motion was made which was duly seconded and unanimously carried that Mr. Maurice Neiman be named temporary vice-president.

“Motion was made which was duly seconded and unanimously carried that S. A. Schloss, Jr., be named temporary treasurer.

“Motion was made which was duly seconded and carried that Arthur Goodman be named temporary secretary, which after much discussion it was decided to consolidate the office of secretary and treasurer and the name of Arthur Goodman, by permission of the parties who nominated him, was withdrawn.

“Motion was made and duly seconded that Messrs. M. G. Mann, Alex Kohn, A.L. Melasky, David Silvers, Julian Cone and H. Frohman constitute temporary Board of Directors. The names of these men were on the original Steering Committee which helped organize Congregation Beth El.

“Messrs. J. Cone and H. Frohman refused to serve and Mr. Max Kahn was named a member of the temporary Board of Trustees and all of the above nominations were duly carried.

“Rabbi Shillman suggested that the books should be ordered for use at the services and Mr. Maurice Neiman very graciously donated fifty prayer books in the memory of his mother and father and authorized Rabbi Shillman to order same for the use of Congregation Beth El.

“Rabbi Shillman then asked for pledges for the support of the Temple. Mr. Maurice Neiman pledged \$250.00 per year; Mr. Leo Gottheimer pledged the sum of \$240.00 per year.

“Mr. Max Kahn and several others spoke enthusiastically about the formation of this congregation and thanked Rabbi Shillman for the part which he played in helping us get organized.

“There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
(Signed) S. A. Schloss, Sec’y-Treas.”

Sisterhood is born

On January 26, 1943, the first Temple Beth El Sisterhood meeting was held at Tanners’ Restaurant on West Trade street. Jo Gottheimer, wife of temple president Leo Gottheimer, was elected president.

Other charter members were Claire Cohen, wife of Hermann Cohen; Phyllis Frohman, wife of Harry Frohman; Katherine Goodman, wife of Arthur Goodman; Blanche Jaffa, wife of Ben Jaffa; Julia Kahn, wife of Max Kahn; Clara Kohn, wife of Alex Kohn; Gladys Lavitan, wife of Murray Jack Lavitan; Selma Melasky, wife of Adolph Melasky; Judith Neiman, wife of Maurice Neiman; Nettie Rosenthal; Carrie Schiff, widow of Louis N. Schiff; Hannah Silvers, wife of David Silvers; Miriam Tarnapol, wife of Irving Tarnapol, and Florette Weil, wife of Harold Weil.

Total membership: 15. Beth El was growing in its first year. Dues of 25 cents per year were collected.

A decade later eighteen new members were inducted into Sisterhood at their October 14, 1953, ceremony. Number one was Ellen Helfgott, wife of the new rabbi. The rest: Charlotte Glazier, Anita Blumenthal, Irene Madalia, Ms. R. Harris, Ms. H. Breitman, Ms. R. Liss, Ms. S. Weil, Ms. J. Buxbaum, Ms. M. Green, Ms. R. Frank, Ms. H. Philipp, Ms. N. Popkin, Ms. P. Segal, Ms. F. Prager, Ms. A. Burke (Cathey Haines on TV), Ms. N. Ades and Ms. H. Unterman.

First four confirmands

This congregation's first confirmation ceremony took place June 13, 1943, at the Charlotte Woman's Club, which still stands at 1001 East Morehead street.

The confirmation class, tutored by Rabbi Philip Frankel, were Elizabeth Goodman, Rita Gottheimer, Stanley Nabow and Jack Rosenberg.

Each received a UAHC form certificate of confirmation reading, "This is to certify that (name) has been duly confirmed in the Faith of Israel this 13th day of June, 1943, corresponding to the 10th day of Sivan 5703 in the presence of Congregation Beth El. Charlotte, NC. (Signed) Philip Frankel, Rabbi."

Memories of our first bar mitzvah

Robert Schrader turned 13 on January 5, 1945. He remembered being bar mitzvah at Beth El that day.

It was the first such ceremony of the new congregation. Joey Raff's was to be the second. Attendance was large at the rented loft above Downtin's foodstore on East Morehead street. His parents Jay and Fan Schrader "looked down so as not to make me laugh" during the ceremony.

Bob said his maturing voice was cracking but he didn't let that deter him. He felt good in the new gray suit his aunt from Chicago had bought at Marshall Field. He was so at ease he went to a movie at the Carolina Theater before services began.

The movie he saw was *Frenchman's Creek*.

Brotherhood's finest hours

Today's champions of brotherhood in the Carolinas have little or no memory of the golden days following World War II and the part Temple Beth El played.

There was a brotherhood rush beginning in 1946 unlike anything that has happened since. Massive meetings of minds and hearts were involved under the canopy of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Author Harry Golden had the power to bring important people to Charlotte to speak at his Carolina Israelite Award ceremonies at Hotel Charlotte. The cast of actors on this fraternal stage included these and more:

Josephus Daniels, publisher of the *Raleigh News and Observer*

Bernard Baruch, counsel to American presidents

Father Cuthbert Allen, OSB, Belmont Abbey College

Rabbi Philip Frankel, Temple Beth El

J. Melville Broughton, governor of North Carolina

Arthur Goodman, founder, Temple Beth El

Harry Golden, publisher, *The Carolina Israelite*, and Secretary, Temple Beth El

Harry Ashmore, *The Charlotte News*

Ivey Stewart, President, Commercial National Bank

Dr. Herbert Spaugh, The Moravian Little Church on the Lane

Edward Scheidt, FBI

John Paul Lucas, Jr., Duke Power

Dorothy Knox, *The Charlotte Observer*

Francis O. Clarkson, Mecklenburg County judge

Dick Blumenthal, Radiator Specialty Company

Herbert Baxter, Mayor of Charlotte

Dr. George Heaton, Myers Park Baptist Church

Clarence Kuester, Charlotte Chamber of Commerce

Edwin L. Jones, J. A. Jones Construction Company

George Ivey, Ivey's Department Store

These were no fair-weather liberals who dressed up for Annual Brotherhood week meetings at Hotel Charlotte's ballroom for awards, good food and fellowship. They rolled up their sleeves year-around to combat racial and religious bigotry. And it showed.

The birth of the State of Israel

The Charlotte Jewish community conducted a historic service at the Seventh Street temple in May, 1948, when both Temple Israel and Temple Beth El prayed and gave thanks together for the recent establishment of the State of Israel.

From the moment Israel became real, both synagogues have been devoted to the welfare of that new/old nation, supporting its people, government, Israeli Defense Forces, and standing among the nations of the world.

Our teachers' institutes

For many years Temple Beth El Sisterhood hosted annual assemblies of Charlotte public and private school teachers. They called them Institutes on Judaism.

For example, on November 6, 1952, eighty-one teachers came from all over Mecklenburg County to jam the temple. They saw Sisterhood exhibits of Jewish holidays, Sabbath observances, rituals and Jewish family life. And they enjoyed sampling the tables of food.

Most of the guest teachers had Beth El children in their classes and were eager to appreciate their faith.

Success followed success. Friday nights were given over to public school teachers to attend services and view the exhibits. Saturday mornings were the time for church school teachers. And Sundays were devoted to neighbors of Jewish families.

A lasting benefit came from these public events. Rabbi Helfgott worked assiduously to convince Beth El members to say goodbye to the Christmas trees in their homes and instead exhibit stars of David and Chanukah menorahs. So the large, lighted star of David displayed at our teachers' institutes caught on. Members got to work building their own stars to bring out from year to year.

Ten years later

March 6 to 8 of 1953 marked a weekend of celebration. Temple Beth El was ten years old and shooting up like a teenager.

Telegrams poured in. So did out-of-town guests. Nathan Hershfield was rabbi at the time. He conducted the anniversary services and hosted famous guest Rabbi Barnett Brickner from Cleveland, OH, as well as neighbor Rabbi Jerome Mark from Gastonia, NC.

Herman Blumenthal presented our past presidents; his brother Dick introduced Rabbi Brickner. Then, not surprisingly, David Nabow and Bert Raff revealed plans for our first building addition which would accommodate our expanding religious school.

Eighty people turned out that special weekend to celebrate our tenth anniversary. Here they are, in order of their signing the registry:

Ms. Ralph Malever, Louis Kalmeyer, Ronnie Liss and wife, Ms. J. Seligman, Mr. and Ms. Samuel Liss, Mr. and Ms. Sidney Kosch, Rabbi Jerome Mark, Mr. and Ms. E. E. Packard, Mr. and Ms. Sherman Lavinson, Mr. Carl Litowitz, Ms. Edward Edelman, Mr. and Ms. Leo Gottheimer, Mr. and Ms. A. L. Melasky, Mr. and Ms. E. Chegar, Mr. and Ms. Laurence Myers, Mr. and Ms. Arthur Myers, Mr. and Ms. Bernard Richter, Mr. and Ms. Manuel Fisher, Mr. and Ms. Herman Blumenthal, Mr. and Ms. Alex Kohn, Mr. and Ms. J. L. Landau, Dr. and Ms. Seymour Silverman, Rabbi Barnett Brickner and Rebecca A. Brickner, Ms. Lewis Bernstein, Mr. and Ms. George Seibert, Mr. and Ms. Irving Richek, Mr. and Ms. Daniel Green, Mr. and Ms. Gerald Lieberman, Mr. and Ms. Walter Klein, Harry Golden, Mr. and Ms. Maurice Neiman, Herbert Marks, Harry Zeckerman, Harry Sobell and Family, Mr. and Ms. Irving Ferster, Mr. and Ms. P. Stewart, Wilson Lewith, Henry Ronay, William Robert Ronay, Mr. and Ms. Howard Glazier, Mr. and Ms. David Nabow and Mr. and Ms. Bert Raff.

Charlotte Jews as deadly targets

It was big news at the time of the High Holy Days in 1958. Twelve sticks of dynamite were discovered on an outside wall of our Providence Road synagogue. Members suddenly woke up to the reality that sacred can suddenly turn into scared.

The police disarmed and removed it. There was no explosion.

Except among members and the community. They took the news hard. Charlotte and its Jewish community had always been close, positive and mutually supportive. This near-violence did not fit. Was it part of a widespread wave of anti-Semitic terrorism?

The Beth El board met and appointed three men to take action: Sol Levine, attorney and member of Temple Israel; Harry Golden, Secretary of Temple Beth El, and Walter Klein.

That committee of three met at once. Their first decision was to contact the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in Washington, which immediately scheduled one of their top executives to fly to Charlotte: Al Vorspan, dynamic activist and author.

Vorspan listened and vetted. Turns out temples in Charlotte, Miami, Nashville, Jacksonville, Gastonia and Birmingham were targets of dynamite terrorists, climaxing October 12 with the devastating bombing of Atlanta's greatest synagogue, The Temple. Within days 75 law enforcers had five men in jail. George Bright was tried; charges against the other four were dropped. Jurors split 9-3 at Bright's trial and he was freed.

Fifty years later Charlotte woke up one late August Shabbat morning to see anti-Semitic obscenities sprayed on the front of our Beth El building. Again the timing of the crime was close to the High Holy Days. One wonderfully positive response was the construction of the Wall of Peace on our front lawn, a spontaneous reaction from the total Charlotte community in the form of graphic expressions of peace and fraternity shared by all faiths. Worshipers during those High Holy Days walked past both the painted-over anti-Semitic vandalism and the positive replies from the total community.

An editorial in *The Charlotte Observer* faced this hate crime squarely:

"Sometimes good can come from bad. That has happened after some sick individual or individuals spray-painted anti-Semitic graffiti on two synagogues at Shalom Park.

"The incident has sparked an outpouring of support from hundreds of area residents and led to the erection of a Wall of Peace to counter the offensive sentiments.

"That response sends the right kind of message to those who wish to foment hate and division. An abundance of people in the Charlotte area say they won't tolerate such filth—and they're willing to stand proudly and proclaim that to others.

"More than 100 people gathered outside Temple Beth El on Wednesday to sing, pray and put positive graffiti on a wall outside the synagogue. Residents came together across religious, racial and ethnic lines to decry such vandalism. Most who spoke, like Rabbi Judy Schindler, wanted to show that actions and words 'can build up' as well as destroy.

"The offensive and demeaning words painted on the synagogues have not been officially classified as a hate crime yet. But we all know it is. Unfortunately, such acts of hatred are on the rise: The Anti-

Defamation League reported 729 incidents of vandalism against Jewish buildings and properties in the United States in 2000—up 7 percent from the year before.

“We all know what we must do in response—denounce it, and loudly.

“Gratifyingly, in Charlotte, hundreds did—through e-mails, calls and in person by leaving their own messages of love on the Wall of Peace. If you want to join them, the wall will remain up at least through the High Holy Days, which begin with Rosh Hashanah services marking the Jewish New Year on Sept. 17.

“You can pick up the paint in the temple office weekdays from 9a.m. to 5p.m. or call (704) 366-1948 to make special arrangements.”

Three teenagers were arrested one month later: Fadi Fathi Hasan, 17; Rami Danil, 18, and Alan Patrick Valdez, 19. Charged with felony ethnic intimidation and misdemeanor damage to real property, they were jailed, tried, found guilty and imprisoned. “You know this was not a juvenile prank or it would not have reached the level for charges of ethnic intimidation,” police spokesman Keith Bridges said.

All through the years of Charlotte’s Jewish Community Center security has been sharp and tight. City-county police and private security officers patrol its 54 acres regularly. JCC members occasionally contribute funds for additional hardware, software and personnel to keep Charlotte’s Jewish center safe and secure.

Another stripe of anti-Semitism prevailed for many painful months in Charlotte after WWII. The Internal Revenue Service opened war on Jewish businesses in Charlotte. Their targets were evidently 100% Jewish and involved both Temple Beth El and Temple Israel members. They involved manufacturing, ladies wear retailing, movie theaters. Most were uptown merchants but not all. At least one went to prison. Another spent days rewriting his company books and then many hours burning his incriminating ledgers in the company furnace in front of trusted employees. IRS got the idea that Jews were active in white-collar crime, stealing sales tax revenue, hiding cash sales and the like. Their activity would have been professional and unassailable were it not for their making a well-publicized campaign against Charlotte Jews.

Our article on Gladys Lavitan mentions the murder of her uncle one night many years ago. A stranger approached him on the street, asked if he were a Jew, and when he said yes, he was murdered. Mike Shulimson was a practicing attorney and member of Temple Beth El. In 1995 a 25-year-old client, looking for drug cash, knocked on his door one morning and when Mike opened it, he was gruesomely knifed to death. When Henrietta Wallace opened her Cotswold door one Halloween night, she, too, was murdered on the spot.

Our outreach Seders

As Beth El grew, so did Charlotte’s churches. Easter observance generated curiosity about Passover at hundreds of congregations. They began calling for help from the experts as they planned Seders of their own. That help expanded from telephone explanations of prayers and foods to our offers of counsel and actually leading the church events.

Demand grew from year to year. Results were always positive and pleasant. Church members enjoy the hard work of setting up tables and chairs, obtaining proper food materials and preparing them, printing

invitations, programs and signs, and being good hosts to the Beth El team--and to their own congregations.

Ministers and Christian congregants review their scriptures and Hebrew and prepare questions for Beth El to answer. Success is measured by church invitations to return for repeat performances in the years that follow.

Beth Shalom

Early in 1970 Rabbi Israel Gerber suddenly announced in writing he would begin new ritual practices, bypassing the Temple Beth El ritual committee. Among them: he would henceforth feel free to wear a miter—headwear symbol of orthodoxy--on the pulpit.

Meetings aired many grievances: the arbitrary break with Reform practices and failures in regard to youth, community relations, pastoral duties and temple-member relations. There was dismay with the Beth El board's philosophy of "You can't please everybody." But officers and board voted against the complainants' call for a positive policy of working to please all members. To avert a breakup, Elizabeth Klein asked the rabbi to meet and talk with him. His reply, "Elizabeth, we have nothing to discuss."

A new congregation, Beth Shalom, was founded by 27 heartbroken but determined families, which grew to 85:

Temple Beth El co-founders Sonny and Selma Melasky
TBE co-founder Katherine Goodman, widow of founder Arthur Goodman
Billie Raff, widow of TBE past president Bert Raff
TBE co-founders Paul and Eve Stewart
Early members Joe and Nell Boyarsky and Edna Reese
Early members Jack and Gladys Lavitan and her mother Julia Kahn
TBE Past president Sidney Kosch and GG
Sam and Raenea Siegel
Steve and Rapha Mitchell
Mr. and Ms. Lee Schlanger
Mr. and Ms. Philip Anoff
Mr. and Ms. Gerald Lieberman
Mr. and Ms. Charles Kline
Mr. and Ms. Leo Ascher
Mr. and Ms. Donald Mallins
Renee and Jules Buxbaum
Mr. and Ms. Robert Bernhardt
Mr. and Ms. Robert Blumenthal
Mr. and Ms. Richard Goodman
Mr. and Ms. Robert Karesh
Mr. and Ms. Joseph Karesh
Mimi and Robert Kehoe
Paula and Richard Klein
Elizabeth and Walter Klein

Margaret and Harry Kottler
Eddie and Charles Leighton
Joy and Harold Mark
Lenore and Walter Marx
Myrna and Lee Schlanger
Mr. and Ms. Irving Stomkin
Manny and Trudy Packard

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations conducted a hearing in Washington and without division or delay approved the rationality and necessity for Beth Shalom to be established on December 13, 1970.

At Myers Park Baptist Church the infant temple found not only a peaceful place to worship but a generous spirit of respect and warmth that remains to this day. The doors of that church opened wide to Beth Shalom, thanks mainly to Dr. R. Eugene Owens, a Methodist turned Baptist minister of extraordinary intellect and great heart. When Owens died, editors of *The Charlotte Observer* said he “was one of the best preachers ever to shake a Charlotte pulpit.” The two congregations, under one roof, often studied, prayed and celebrated together in brotherhood. The meeting room Beth Shalom members selected is still named Shalom Hall a generation later. It was round, which made congregants feel wonderfully equal wherever they sat, like King Arthur’s round table.

Over the years four rabbis served Beth Shalom—Mel Silverman, Stan Skolnik, Myra Soifer and Bob Seigel, all of whom brought wholesome doses of philosophy and joy to young and old. Mel’s wife Margaret would sit on the front row during services. Occasionally she would throw him a silent kiss, which Mel knew meant, *Keep It Short, Stupid*.

Beth Shalom was Silverman’s first pulpit. He was a religious school teacher in his home city of Los Angeles before his HUC-JIR ordination. His sermons were often laced with language enriched by his English-born wife.

After Rabbi Gerber was let go by Beth El, and through efforts of professionals and lay leaders, the two congregations became one again in 1986. Rabbi Silverman returned to his California life where he became full-time rabbi to the many Jewish prisoners at Chino Prison. His recently published memoirs, *Born Jewish...Becoming a Jew*, take the reader on a unique trip from behind the pulpit. Rabbi Robert Seigel was voted the spiritual leader of the combined congregation. His daughter, Tamar Seigel Bernstein, remains a vital member of Temple Beth El today.

And her husband, Adam Bernstein, is its president.

Dreams are made of this

Morris Speizman, Mark Bernstein and other movers and shakers met on Morris’ porch one Sunday afternoon to consider the future of all Charlotte’s Jewish facilities.

The August, 1983, fire that consumed the Amity Country Club’s entire building had driven these leaders to face reality. All our real estate was aging out at one time. Temple Israel, Temple Beth El and the Amity Country Club were at a crossroads in their history. The Jewish community was facing three

building drives at one time.

Which direction? Build one institution now and postpone two? Allow a free-for-all battle for dollars, forcing the community to choose which temple or club should move forward and which wait? Or run away from reality and witness painful decay?

They opted to combine forces and goals, to rebuild everything in their dreams in one location, under one governance, in one ideal in-city location, to create an entirely new Jewish Community Center and call it Shalom Park. Temples. Indoor and outdoor sports venues. Education facilities. Recreation. An end to parking problems. Easy access to the city. An interlocking complex to accommodate all needs, all ages and all branches of our faith. *Exclamation point.*

It took years of blood, sweat, toil and tears and a startup \$5.1 million that kept expanding into three decades. A vast campus of fifty-four acres of precious land was assembled within Charlotte's city limits. This phenomenon dramatically took form to serve Jewish and non-Jewish families alike. Financed solidly, safely and wisely, it is a model for all America.

The joint venture brought together as one the Sandra and Leon Levine Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, Jewish Family Services, Temple Israel and Temple Beth El.

Today nicknamed *The J*, Shalom Park draws lasting national admiration and unending thanks from the Jewish people of the Charlotte region who bask in its light. It is more than a memorial to the wonderful people who made it happen. It is alive, busy and crowded day and night with Jewish people and their friends whose lives are enriched because of it.

In particular, Temple Beth El rose atop its own private hill within Shalom Park, the result of superb planning and planting. The view today from the Blumenthal sanctuary through its bimah window wall is pure and pastoral, unblemished by parking lots, power lines and city traffic which the largest and costliest church in Charlotte suffers.

The grounds are handsome from all perspectives, though a biblical garden considered for the lowest-lying area never happened. Rolling topography lends drama to all photos.

Biblical theme stained glass windows punctuate the Beth El building, but they pale next to the spectacular stained glass experience of Temple Israel next door.

Its sanctuary is airy, bright and warm thanks to a meld of mahogany, glass, marble, NC flagstone, metal, smart lighting and skylights. It is remarkably un-busy.

Traffic flow works well on the curving rise-and-fall of the terrain.

The completion of the new Beth El temple celebrated October 9-11, 1992, was—and remains—a source of pride to the huge team of heroic members who worked mightily to make everything succeed. Today's Temple Beth El is a victory of art, architecture and amity.

250,000 protesters march in Washington

Many members of Temple Beth El joined a large Charlotte group organized by our Federation on Sunday, December 6, 1987.

Rabbi Robert Seigel of Temple Beth El led the busload. The mission was to demonstrate to the world that Jews will gather at the sound of the shofar when their people are in danger. Upwards of 250,000 Jews and non-Jews marched through Washington to demand the USSR release all Soviet Jews who wanted their freedom.

They then assembled peacefully and powerfully in sight of the US capitol. Elie Wiesel and others delivered impassioned talks.

All this happened in Washington two days before President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikail Gorbachev signed a pact to dismantle all their 2,611 missiles.

Celebrations

There were reasons to pause for causes beyond those connected with our buildings.

The congregation's 25th anniversary was celebrated with a dinner dance and a special confirmation service. The grand ballroom of the White House Inn was the site of the cocktail hour, formal dinner and dance beginning at 7:30pm, May 4, 1968. Loonis McGlohon and his orchestra played.

On Sunday night, June 1, 1968, at 8 pm, eighteen of our young people were confirmed in the TBE sanctuary: Paul Floyd Moritz, Lynn Carla Jaffe, Andrew Roy Smith, Kathy Jane Klein, Alan Breitman, Janis Ilene Dresner, Wayne Scott Gerber, Linda Lee Gross, Robert Marx, Karen Sara Millman, Judith Anne Wender, Eugene Russell Montezinos, Tobi Rose Wallace, Jerome Robert Klein, Carol Martha Natelson, Michael Sanford Gerber, Lenore Marie Fuerstman and Stuart Lawrence Wolf.

The first service in the new \$3.2 million temple took place August 21, 1992, when 700 persons attended and marked a new high of 530 families affiliated.

The October 9, 1992, Sabbath service signaled the dedication of the newly completed Temple Beth El in Shalom Park. Honored guests included Charlotte Mayor Richard Vinroot, County Commission Chair Rod Autry, Mecklenburg Ministries President James C. Howell, Mecklenburg Ministries Director Dianne English, and US House Representative Alex McMillan. The next night comedian David Brenner starred at a fundraising dinner.

The first Beth El history

Judith B. Neiman wrote me January 2, 1981, stating she had written the first Beth El history for the Beth El 1952-3 yearbook. It is valuable but flawed. It contains no coverage of anything happening until two December, 1942, meetings--in Arthur Goodman's office and at Milton Mann's home. In fact, the project was in the works much earlier, triggered by the departure of Rabbi Bill Greenburg from Agudath Achim.

Judy takes credit for first proposing Beth El as its name; actually it was Elizabeth Goodman. Judy wrote that the first service was held January 1, 1943. Actually it was December 11, 1942. All the rest of her piece matches the other accounts that followed.

The February, 1983, issue of *The American Jewish Times Outlook*, published and written by Chester A. Brown in Greensboro, NC, contained his *Historic Highlights of Temple Beth El*.

The document here, after whittling to 857 words, contains a worthy chronological summary of events from 1942 to 1982.

"...Ground was broken at our present site on June 18, 1948; the formal dedication and the first service were on January 28, 1949. The first wedding in the new sanctuary was that of Hilda Malever to Raymond Kirsner on October 8, 1950. The Temple continued to grow, reaching 116 in 1952...During that era, some other traditions began: specialty suppers, interfaith services and the community Seder.

"Ground was broken for our education building in 1954...It was followed by the fellowship hall building in 1961...At the dedication of the religious school in 1955, Claire (Ms. Hermann E.) Cohen was appointed the first religious school administrator...An activity which proved particularly meaningful to the general community was the 'Services to the blind' created by the late Bernice Altbach in the early 1960s and carried on in a most dedicated manner by Herman Bauman. Our annual Wildacres retreats began in 1966 and have added much to the lives of many of our congregants and friends.

"For many years we had an outstanding volunteer choir, which was augmented in 1966 by the presence of our first cantor, Peter Taormina. In 1967 Cantor H. Richard Brown came to Temple Beth El; he served as our Religious School Educator and Cantor until 1975.

"Our first Cadillac Ball was held in 1969 and was an annual event through 1976. This was a fundraiser for our sisterhood, an event enjoyed by all. In 1969 Herman Blumenthal became our first Honorary Lifetime President. Also in 1969 Rose and Sam Jaffe celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at temple with special services and a reception.

"Many of our members went on the first temple trip to Israel...in March of 1970...In the 70's our tradition of interdenominational Thanksgiving services was expanded to include the Unitarians, Baha'i, Quakers and a number of other denominations.

"One of the saddest moments of our history came in 1970 when our beloved custodian Clarence Thacker died of a heart attack. His funeral was held at Temple Beth El, with many of our members serving as pallbearers. Our children still remember him and recall how good he was to them.

"By the late 1960s it had become obvious that the present site of Temple Beth El would no longer be adequate; the board started looking for a new site. The 1971 yearbook notes:

'The long-range planning committee...has established its dream. We have purchased 24 acres of land on Providence Road near Lansdowne. It is much more than just land; it represents for all of us a vision... of children working with the educational facilities that are so desperately needed; it is a vision of the new sanctuary where prayer and pride meet; it is a vision of recreational facilities for our youth to enjoy.'

"Unforeseen circumstances delayed fulfillment of that 1971 vision, but now the educational and recreational facilities are just around the corner, with construction of the new campus. Our new sanctuary is going to be placed just where the long-range planning committee envisioned.

"In 1972 Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz became our rabbi. That year we established the Tree of Life donated by some of our members. This simcha tree denotes happy and meaningful occasions in the lives of our families and friends.

"On March 23, 1973, Irving Richek was installed as our second Lifetime President. In February, 1974,

we had a new ‘first’—the b’nei mitzvah of three adult men: Ron Liss, Charles Bolno and Bud Rosenbaum... And who can forget our wonderful senior members Birdie Brandon and Hermann Cohen? On May 10, 1974, we celebrated Birdie’s 90th birthday...1974 also marked the arrival of our new rabbi, Lawrence Jackofsky.

“Our Chagall windows were done in needlepoint by Sisterhood members...and placed in our sanctuary during the 1970s. In 1976 we rejoiced with the Jackofsky family on the birth of their son Daniel.

“In 1976 we welcomed our current rabbi, Harold I. Krantzler, and his wife Helen. In April, 1976, we celebrated Rabbi Krantzler’s receiving his Doctor of Divinity degree from Hebrew Union College. In June...we honored I. D. Blumenthal on the occasion of his second bar mitzvah at the age of 83.

“In 1980 we participated in the Hannukah Run for Peace. A highlight of 1981 was the trip to Israel during which five of our children were bar/bat mitzvah at Masada: Amy Huberman, Marc Huberman, Daniel Bernstein, David Bernstein and Leslie Kaplan.

“October, 1981, was a very sad month for Temple Beth El: Harry Golden died. And the tragic death of Henrietta Wallace later that month was commemorated by the establishment of the Henrietta Wallace Collection of Southern Judaica in her memory.

“In July, 1982, Benjamin Schrader was the first child to become bar mitzvah at Wildacres. This took place at Temple Beth El’s annual retreat July 8 to 11. The consecration of Chad Levy that fall marked the first participation of four generations of one family in Temple Beth El: Chad follows his mother, Betsy Klein; grandmother, Elizabeth Klein, and great-grandmother, Katherine Goodman—all active Temple Beth El members.”

A lesser Beth El history

Now here are all 199 words recently published online as Temple Beth El’s official and total description of the first 66 years of its history. That’s three words per year. Author not identified. Compare it with the approximate 50,000 words in this book, *The Bridge Table*:

“Temple Beth El’s first home was in a room above Dowtin’s grocery store at 1412½ Morehead Street in Charlotte.* Rabbi Philip Frankel served as the first Rabbi. Leo Gottheimer served as the Temple’s first president, and renowned author Harry Golden wrote its first constitution.

“By 1946, the congregation had grown to 46 families.** Ground was broken for a new building in June 1948, and the first service was held at 1727 Providence Road (now the Dore Academy) the following January. As the membership rolls continued to increase, the congregation added an education building and fellowship hall. Beth El traditions that survive to this day began to take hold: the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service and the annual Retreat at Wildacres in the Blue Ridge Mountains every Labor day.

“By the Temple’s 40th birthday in 1983, the congregation had 320 families. In 1987, Temple Beth El merged with Temple Beth Shalom,*** and a new era began.

“Once in a Lifetime” became the theme for a fundraising campaign to build a new Temple at Shalom Park. Five years later, the dream became reality as the Torah was placed in the magnificent marble ark of the new Temple Beth El in August of 1992.”

**Actually Hotel Charlotte ** According to Sonny Melasky, It was 68*

**** 1986 was the year*

Documents

Our Torahs

The first Torah was the first gift to Temple Beth El, the one most essential, most sacred object to all Jewish congregations, given by Katherine and Arthur Goodman in 1942. Philip Bernstein's family gave the second in his memory seven years later. Eve and Paul Stewart presented the third in 1954. The fourth was contributed by Trudy and Manny Packard in 1964. Elizabeth and I gave the fifth Torah to Beth Shalom and then to Beth El.

That fifth scroll is our Holocaust Torah, lovingly restored and entrusted to us twice by the Memorial Scrolls Trust in London. It came from the Great Synagogue in Brno, or Brunn, 111 miles southeast of Prague. Brno was the royal city of Moravia, the cultural, social and economic center of the region. The Torah is quite old. Rabbi Seigel correctly guessed that it goes back to circa 1400, at the time of the thriving Jewish community in the center of Brno dating from the first third of the thirteenth century. Our Torah had resided in the Velka synagogue at the corner of Spalena and Prozova streets. The nazis burned it down, first adding this Torah to their criminal collection of artifacts of the race they were erasing, and after murdering all 12,000 Brno Jews. The priceless Torah at Temple Beth El in Charlotte, NC, USA, may be all that is left of the Great Synagogue. Another temple was built in Brno in 1935; it is back in use today.

Many famous Jews came from that city: composers Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Walter Klein. Playwrights Philipp Langmann, Leo Greiner, Ernst Weiss, Oskar Jellinek and Felix Langer. Painters Elisabeth Weingarten, Clara Epstein, Otto Unghar and Kudvik Blum. Architect Arnost Wiesner. Philologists Theodor Gomperz and Roman Jakobson. Violinist Heinrich Wilhelm Ernest.

In 1970 Beth Shalom of Charlotte sought and was granted Torah Number 698 out of 1,564 rescued after World War II. It became the treasure of Temple Beth El when the two temples reunited in 1986.

There is an intriguing Torah bond between Temple Beth El of Charlotte and the Brno Great Synagogue from whence our Holocaust Torah came. A man named Richard Klein was born in Neustadt, Bohemia, in 1861. After he married Louisa Prager, the couple lived out their lives in Namiest, a suburb of Brno. Richard was a chemical engineer, a botanist and a career Austrian army captain. Louisa and Richard had three children: Hildegard, Gerda and Ella. The focus of their faith was the Velka synagogue, the Great Synagogue of Brno. That Richard was a brother of Julius Klein, my grandfather and great grandfather of our son Richard Klein, who bears that same name today.

Let us continue to the Melasky family Torah. Such a phenomenon is historic among fiscally and religiously wealthy Jewish families. Selma and Sonny and their family own theirs even as it resides in Temple Beth El's ark. It served as the sole Torah of Beth Shalom until the arrival of the Holocaust Torah. Then it was the first thing visitors saw in the seven years of the Beth El history exhibit in our chapel. When that display was terminated in 2008, the Melasky family agreed their family Torah could become the sixth scroll in the Beth El sanctuary, with alternative use in the chapel ark.

We had Torah trouble in 1993. Funds for nine new torah covers, with new names on them, had been solicited and received without consulting the original donors of the Torahs. The thoughtless idea was to sell a new category of memorials without regard to the ethical breach of removing the identities of

the Goodman, Bernstein, Stewart, Packard and Klein families. The improper covers were discovered, removed and stored. Later, permanent brass ID plates were attached to each wood Torah frame so their donors would not again be dismissed.

First constitution and bylaws

It was on December 27, 1948, *six years* after the first service of Temple Beth El, that the congregation proudly published its first constitution and by-laws, newly written by Harry Golden in behalf of Harry Frohman, President; A. L. Melasky, Vice-President; Bert Raff, Treasurer; himself as Secretary, and the entire membership.

The temple's board of trustees consisted of those officers plus Tommy Taylor, Larry Madalia, Jay Schrader, Buster Hirsch, T. R. Kramer, John Baron, Joe Cohen, Paul Stewart, Herman Blumenthal, H. B. Meiselman, Paul Fligel, Ed Sigal, Maurice Neiman and Joe Boyarsky.

Honorary members of the Board were Fan Schrader, Hermann Cohen, Dave Nabow, Leo Gottheimer and George Seibert.

Years later there would be freshly written rules. But for that moment in history, the 1948 document prevailed. It consisted of eight articles on 13 double-spaced pages. The following cover letter written by Harry Golden, Secretary, is remarkably revealing about a young, promising Temple Beth El:

"Dear Member:

"As authorized by the Congregation, we are attaching herewith a set of the newly adopted BY-LAWS, under which your temple will be operated in the future. Please read them carefully. Please preserve them carefully for future reference.

"The new BY-LAWS provide that the secretary shall send a resume of all meetings of the Board of Trustees, and this shall constitute the first of such reports.

"The most recent meeting of the Board was held on December 8, 1948, in the vestry of the temple. The following matters were introduced and discussed:

(a) Our congregation intends to vacate the premises on East Morehead Street during January, 1949.

(b) Our services and activities shall be transferred to our new building at that time, and a committee (the president, the rabbi and the secretary) shall arrange a suitable dedicatory program.

The great need for immediate cash funds was stressed by the building committee and by all the members of the Board. It was decided to start a drive to urge all members who made cash pledges to pay them now, so that we may be able to take possession of our new temple. It was also decided to start a new drive to get new pledges of cash and building & loan pledges from those who have no participation in the new temple as of this date.

"The Board of Trustees, in accordance with the new BY-LAWS was increased by presidential appointment by the following members: Herman Blumenthal, Paul Fligel, Ed Sigal, David Silvers, H. B. Meiselman and Paul Stewart.

"The consensus of the Board was that we may look forward with great optimism and great encouragement

to the future. We have an outstanding Rabbi. A Temple of outstanding prestige, and a membership whose enthusiasm for the welfare of this Liberal Jewish organization is both boundless and big-hearted, and on that happy note the Board adjourned with its sincere wishes to all for a HAPPY CHANUKAH SEASON.

“Sincerely, Harry L. Golden, Secretary”

Katherine Goodman’s 1911 confirmation bible and Arthur Goodman’s 1919 Union Prayer Book

Katherine Cohen received a pristine copy of the then newly-published Isaac Leeser bible when she was confirmed at Temple Beth Zion in Buffalo, NY, in 1911. Her mother had been confirmed on the same Reform pulpit a generation earlier. *See page 151.*

Katherine (“Katzie”) grew up to marry Arthur Goodman, founder of Temple Beth El. His mother, Sophia Stiel Goodman, gave him his Union Prayer Book in 1919.

Such are the Reform Jewish credentials of the founding family of Temple Beth El.

The printing ink never sets over Beth El

Our monthly bulletin of today, *The Voice*, is acknowledged as an articulate and handsome publication, head-and-shoulders above other temple and church bulletins in the region. Its high-style design is the product of a local graphic design firm. Execution is in the hands of Amy Seitlin Brown, UNC and Townson trained, who delivers the news by mail and TBE website and always on time.

Its predecessors were more modest, shirtsleeve newsletters that were nevertheless just as appreciated as *The Voice* of today.

The first non-periodical in TBE history was an elegant, cost-be-damned folder to raise funds for the first Beth El temple structure on Providence Road. Ed Sigal, dress shop owner and father of Paula Musler, wanted to do his part for the building campaign and that was it for him. Shiny white cover stock, gold-engraved, richly printed, it spelled elegance. It drew the funds to make our first sanctuary a reality. Since then, it’s been sixty-some years of programs, religious school materials, memorial lists, invitations, anniversary publications and original services written by our rabbis.

And yearbooks. For years they were looked forward to by the congregation as special surprises. One had a cover that opened like the front doors of the temple. Another was six-sided like a Star of David. They reviewed the year’s changes in worship, education, membership, fellowship and life-cycle events.

All contained obligatory messages from rabbis and presidents of both temples. But it was the flood of fresh photos that won the hearts of members, who saved their yearbooks like family keepsakes.

The quality of our periodicals and printed matter kept getting better, but the people who created it from 1942 to today could not possibly improve.

The Blumenthal family automotive chemical business had its own printing facility. Temple Beth El asked for and received countless orders for temple bulletins, mass mailers, announcements and office forms. It was always on the house. And there was never a *quid pro quo*—no mention of Radiator Specialty Company products, no little free ads in the printing. It was one of many Blumenthal gifts to Temple Beth El.

Our children make the cover

The Chanukah 1957 issue of *American Judaism* magazine gave Temple Beth El a taste of national fame and pride. *See page 132.*

The front cover of that highly respected Reform Jewish publication featured an exquisite photograph of three children from Temple Beth El—Jenel Stewart, daughter of Eve and Paul Stewart; Steve Helfgott, son of Ellen and Rabbi Mel Helfgott, and Alan Hirsch, son of Alene and Abner Jacques (“Buster”) Hirsch.

The tight close-up has them in front of burning Chanukah candles, the sole light source.

The People **Arthur Goodman**

One needs to know Arthur Goodman in order to know Temple Beth El.

Think of him in terms of his identities: Jewish, lawyer, Mason, politician, humanitarian, Democrat, white, veteran, disabled, Confederate southerner. His activities were at once esoteric and broadly popular.

He was born Abraham Bysshe (Benjamin) Goodman March 12, 1897, in Portsmouth, VA, the first generation born there. His parents were Solomon and Sophia Stiel Goodman, married October 16, 1888, at 196 Church street, Norfolk, VA. His grandfather was Ariea Mayer Goodman, 1827-1903. Solomon ran a furniture store there ("Let your next furniture be from GOODMAN—Price gratifies, Quality Satisfies... Effingham street one block from High"). His funeral was said to have been the largest in that city's history. After his death, the family moved to nearby Norfolk. Abe volunteered in the Navy there June 10, 1918. While attending naval officers' training school, he suffered an injury that led to lifelong muscular atrophy. He was discharged September 30, 1921.

Sophia and her seven grown children dispersed from Norfolk like so many drops of mercury. Always close, they knew they would stay tight wherever they ended up. The oldest, John, moved to Hopewell, VA. Moe made a new life in Roxboro, North Carolina. Blanche, the youngest, and husband Ben Jaffa, went to North Wilkesboro and Mooresville, NC. Louis ("Lookie") moved to Durham, NC, with his mother. Dave chose Asheville and then Long Beach, California. Dora (Dorothy) married Arthur Cohen (Collins), and together moved to London, England, his birthplace. Blanche and Ben Jaffa, and twin sons Sol and Ben, Jr., ended up in Charlotte with Sophia at 1232 East Boulevard.

Abe became the 23-year-old manager-buyer for the Bon Marche department stores in Wilmington and Charlotte, NC, owned by Louis Lipinsky of Asheville, who had a third Bon Marche in that city. Goodman's lifelong involvement in child and animal welfare began in Wilmington. In 1921 he originated a program he called, "Children's Health Is Wilmington's Wealth." He earned city-wide respect as a community booster. (*See page 146*). By now he had adopted the name Arthur, retaining Abraham as his Hebrew name. After his transfer to Charlotte, he went on a buying trip to New York where he met Katherine "Katie" Cohen working as a secretary. They fell in love at first sight; he proposed that same night. They saw each other only twice again before their large wedding in Buffalo's Statler hotel July 8, 1924.

The crash of 1929 made him decide on a career change from retailing to that of law. He had attended a private business college in Norfolk in 1916. Now he sought and won a scholarship to Trinity College, which was to become Duke University. There, with a wife and two children and barely getting by selling insurance in Durham, he passed the NC bar exam after only 1½ years of study.

He immediately opened his own law office in Charlotte as that city's only Jewish attorney. *All* of his professional life was spent in his seventh floor offices of the Law Building uptown. His protégés became noteworthy attorneys on their own. Morris Speizman called one of them the dean of the local legal profession: Maurice A. Weinstein.

The Goodman family of Portsmouth were always committed Reform Jews. They were members of historic Reform Temple Ohel Sholom Temple. Their century-old Union Prayer Books, both Sabbath and

High Holy Days, survive today in the family's care.

When Arthur conceived Temple Beth El, he turned first to his sister and brother-in-law, Blanche and Ben Jaffa, and good friends whose family tradition was Reform, to begin a new era in Charlotte Judaism. Arthur had been president of Hebrew United Brotherhood. Ben Jaffa was an active board member, and that fact caused a problem. When Temple Beth El organized, Ben Jaffa was pleased to be asked to serve on its board. But the rabbi and board of Hebrew United Brotherhood strongly objected to his serving on the board of both congregations at the same time. So in spite of the Jaffa family background being strongly Reform, Ben Jaffa dropped his membership in Temple Beth El. He and his sons Sol and Ben served as leaders of Temple Israel for years.

Early Reform-minded families had met occasionally in their homes as an experiment in Sabbath observance years before Temple Beth El was born. Among them were Carrie Schiff, Nettie Rosenthal, Edna Hirschinger and her daughter Marion Cannon of the Cannon Mills family. But there had been no Reform rabbi, religious school or observation of life cycle services—and no motivation to break away from the warm, albeit diverse, Jewish life everyone enjoyed at Hebrew United Brotherhood. However, the departure of Rabbi Bill Greenburg from the Charlotte scene and the advent of Rabbi Elihu Michelson turned Hebrew United Brotherhood into a solid Conservative-Orthodox outpost.

Arthur Goodman thought about that at his bridge table.

Which people did he call on to organize the new Reform congregation—and why?

One couple he invited to meet in his living room was Leo and Joan (Jo) Gottheimer. Goodman had them in mind to be the new congregation's first president and musical soloist. Sonny Melasky was "Doctor Pepper" to friends in the Charlotte community because he held the Dr. Pepper bottling franchise. Ben Jaffa built a modest chain of dime stores called Southern Five and Ten in the Charlotte area. Milton Mann was a traveling salesman and neighbor of the Melaskys. Mann signed the Beth El organizing document but soon dropped out. He later joined Myers Park Baptist Church and today his son Tom says neither he nor his family were ever Jewish. It must have slipped his mind that his mother's close relative was a rabbi in Chattanooga.

Murray Jack Lavitan was a dedicated veterinarian whose wife Gladys was to be the educational heart of the new temple for half a century. Petite Carrie Schiff was known as a member of a leading Reform family, as was Simeon "Happy" Schloss, who headed Charlotte's leading outdoor advertising (billboard) firm. Alex Kohn operated Carolina Houdaille Company, an automotive supply firm. Maurice Neiman (say Neeman) was one of several uptown retail jewelers who supplied rings and watches to thousands of soldiers. And then there were Dave and Hannah Silvers.

Not to forget Arthur Goodman, Jr. This teenage ambivert was more than an observer as the Beth El drama unfolded. From childhood he was set on becoming a rabbi. His Hebrew was sharper than that of most of the Beth El founders, for he had one-on-one instruction from Moravian minister Herbert Spaugh, a family friend, and also studied in religious school. His plan was to go to college at the University of Cincinnati, followed by four years of Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary right across the street.

That destiny had to wait as war broke out. Like me, he quit school to volunteer, cajoling parents for their permission because of being underage. He won his war as a sailor in the Pacific and returned to Belmont Abbey College and Duke law school instead of HUC-JIR. He always supported Beth El but his religious comfort was at Temple Israel. And his career comfort became law.

Back in 1942 Arthur Goodman, Jr. (Sonny to his family) was the one right choice to lead the first Temple Beth El services at Hotel Charlotte Friday night, December 12, and for weeks more until a rabbi was retained.

Now as to *why* these families opted to start up a new Reform presence in Mecklenburg County, one could devote a lengthy chapter just to answer that. Or one short sentence might suffice: *After Rabbi Greenburg left, there was no longer a place in Charlotte for Reform Jews to worship.* Fact is, the Beth El founders were primarily German Jews and the remainder at Temple Israel were principally Eastern European Jews. If you asked Beth El members, then or now, they would confirm this point. In those days the birthplace of ancestors made all the difference in the world. And the birth *year* was all-important. Most Reform Jews took pride in being born in America and therefore had no foreign accents. Many Temple Israel members brought to Charlotte their bitter and sweet memories of Eastern European life—and their tongues still carried the taste of languages other than English.

If you asked Temple Israel members, then or now, they would say the Beth El founders were “not so religious.” They would offer as examples the matters of the study of and strict adherence to Torah, importance of Hebrew proficiency, frequency of attending services, bar mitzvah and faithful observance of Shabbat, other holidays and food laws. That, too, was true. Reform Jews traditionally were not so traditional. They took pains and pride in their smooth integration into the society of the new world, freedom to make personal observance decisions and respecting the dynamics of change.

(In the 1930s, upon meeting the mother of my sister’s wonderful fiancé and hearing her Russian accent, my parents insisted my sister break the engagement at once. Broken hearts were not as important as mixing German and Russian Jewish heritages.)

Goodman’s humanitarian qualities stood out in the winter of 1934 when two chain gang prisoners were shackled in solitary confinement in a prison camp outside Charlotte. Their legs froze and had to be amputated to keep them from dying from frostbite. Goodman stepped forward to represent them and secured Woodrow Wilson Shropshire and Robert Barnes compensation of \$20 per month each. Years later, the legless men asked Goodman to help them with more money to sustain themselves. By then in the legislature, he introduced a bill to increase the obligation of the NC Highway Department with an outright grant of \$4,500 each. He, and the disabled prisoners, won.

Goodman served three terms in the North Carolina state legislature. He would appoint Jewish youngsters such as Joshua Tofield, the rabbi’s son, as legislature page boys.

His concern for children and animals drove him to found Mecklenburg County’s first humane society. He volunteered as a Boy Scout merit badge counselor. He wrote new legislation to stop the dyeing and sale of baby chicks as Easter toys that, entrusted to small children, suffered and died. Citizens concerned with the protection of children and animals would traditionally go to Goodman to write and promote appropriate legislation.

For many years Goodman celebrated his birthday, March 12, by staging a party at Fireman’s Hall on 7th street for all the disabled children in Charlotte. The Arthur Goodman Birthday Party drew handicapped youngsters from homes, hospitals and institutions. They came aboard all manner of fire apparatus.

As president of the state UCP association, he headed a United Cerebral Palsy radiothon. Served as president of Temple Israel. Worked several terms as president of the NC Association of Jewish Men and Women. Raised funds for the renovation of Mercy Hospital. Was state commander of the Disabled

American Veterans. Cofounded the Carolinas Spastics Association. He cofounded the Charlotte chapter of NCCJ, the only one in America with its own full-time professional. Did his part founding the Shrine Bowl.

Arthur Goodman Memorial Park turned out to be his most important humanitarian contribution. He had bought acreage in Matthews as a weekend refuge from telephones for himself and Katherine. His love of animals moved him to invest in a few chickens, a pair of goats and two burros. After his death, Katherine saw no joy in going back alone to her husband's retreat. Family members offered the property to banker Zeb Strawn, whose committee took lively interest. They could now provide a ball field to Matthews kids who had been deprived of their school playground when insurance coverage was withdrawn on after-school use. One of those kids was Little Leaguer Robert Klein, Arthur Goodman's grandson.

Parents of Matthews School students went for the idea from the start. Whole generations of children spent time learning and competing in baseball, softball, football, volleyball, soccer, lacrosse and other sports. Today upwards of a thousand youngsters participate every year in a Matthews Athletic and Recreational Association program with an annual budget of—would you believe this?—\$905,000. The first playing field at 200 East Trade Street has grown to become a substantial part of the town of Matthews, North Carolina. That town never forgets Arthur Goodman, whose family is honored every March on the Saturday morning when the season reopens.

The day he died Judge Francis Clarkson led Mecklenburg judges in canceling courts in his honor. Oldtimers could not remember another funeral cortege so long and attended by police on every street corner along the way to Hebrew cemetery.

Arthur Goodman lives on in his descendants. They honor his memory as they perform good works for Temple Beth El. In his lifetime his son pitched in as rabbi of Beth El until a professional was found. And so much has happened since that would stir his heart were he here to witness it:

His grandson Richard becoming President of Beth Shalom

His son-in-law Walter becoming President of both Beth El and Beth Shalom

His daughter Elizabeth becoming Beth El Sisterhood President

His grandson Robert's wife Moira possibly becoming President of Beth El

His sister Blanche's granddaughter Susan Jacobs becoming Beth El Education Director

And then there was Katherine

I asked my mother-in-law, Katherine Goodman, 93, if she'd like to play a few hands of gin. She answered, "Deal 'em."

And with that, a great lady died.

Her last two words were fun words, and that was Katherine Cohen Goodman. She had outlived her famed husband by 30 years, as her mother had outlived her husband by 30 years. The record she left was one of living life to its fullest—sharp, witty, wise, never wasting words or minutes.

She would write checks to many charities, small but dependable sums, to the end. But then she herself was small, especially when positioned next to her towering husband. "Mutt and Jeff," people would say

about their tall-short image when they were together, which was just about always.

Her community service commitments matched Arthur's. She worked hard to assure fundraising projects succeeded for Temple Beth El, Beth Shalom, the Humane Society, Mercy Hospital, NC Association of Jewish Men and Women and the Democratic Party. She campaigned with her husband throughout his political career, attending countless barbecues without eating it. Her days were taken with visiting shut-ins, the sick and injured.

Life and Katherine Goodman were good for each other.

Harry Golden and Temple Beth El

Funny thing about this man.

Were it not for him, the city of Charlotte, North Carolina, would barely have been mentioned in today's most popular Jewish encyclopedia. No Temple Beth El. No Temple Israel. No JCC. No other Jewish names. Not one of Charlotte's rabbis or Jewish leaders or religious history.

Fortunately Golden's world fame as author, lecturer and columnist did not escape *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Here is their write-up:

"GOLDEN, HARRY LEWIS (Herschel Goldhurst; 1902--). U.S. author, editor and publisher. One of five children of immigrants from Austria-Hungary, Golden was born on New York's Lower East Side.* His father was an editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*. Golden studied English literature, but left university without taking his degree. During the 'Roaring Twenties' he was sentenced to five years imprisonment for running a Wall Street gambling den. On his release he moved south, changing his name to Golden and becoming a successful journalist. Golden is best known for his one-man newspaper, *The Carolina Israelite*, which he published from 1942 to 1969. He was much admired by American liberals for his witty and courageous stand in favor of Negro integration, attacking race hatred as absurd rather than criminal. His best-selling books *Only in America* (1958), *For 2 Cents Plain* (1959) and *Enjoy, Enjoy* (1960) were drawn from some of his editorials. Much of their charm lies in their folkloristic description of Jewish immigrant life. His other works include *Mr. Kennedy and the Negroes* (1964), *So What Else Is New* (1964) and an autobiography, *The Right Time* (1969). In 1965 he published *A Little Girl Is Dead* about the Leo Frank case."

A photo by Declan Haun accompanied the article.

The Charlotte Observer was one of about 200 newspapers that regularly carried Golden's columns. Its editors kept his secret about his having done hard time in Atlanta Penitentiary, instead treating him as a celebrated scholar in a field all his own. They looked on Harry as a personal journalist in the tradition of William Allen White. They hired one of Harry's sons, Harry, Jr., as a full-time writer.

After Jack Parr talked with him many times on his late night television show, hundreds of thousands of dollars poured in to Golden at his Elizabeth Avenue home in advance payments of subscriptions to *The Carolina Israelite*—which was his way of describing himself. His booming subscription list now included famed legislators, authors and professionals who were drawn to this little man with the big intellect who could find something funny in hatred. I listened in awe as he read me mail from political and educational leaders who sought his opinions. Harry was so admired that scores of wannabe writers sent him publishers'

proofs of their upcoming books asking him to say nice things for the jackets. Harry graciously did so and was happy to accept nothing more than a free book in payment. Those books lined Harry's office; he kept them all.

Success bred more success. He was the first Jew to make the UNC Journalism Hall of Fame. Reader's Digest was paying him 25 cents a word for all his articles they reprinted. Harry was incredulous as RD checks poured in, still at 25 cents per word, for every foreign edition they printed. He continued writing books until he exceeded 20, and all while he was a Beth El member.

One friendship that matured from all this was with fellow North Carolinian Carl Sandburg. The two were together often until the poet-author's 1967 death. Harry liked to quote Sandburg's definition of heaven as two Polacks lying by the river on a Sunday afternoon drinking beer.

Through much of his career in Charlotte Golden's closest buddy was Temple Beth El rabbi Phil Frankel. Weekends those two would schmooze first and shave later. They were true brothers while Phyllis Frankel stayed home in Charlotte and Harry's wife Tiny stayed in New York where their retarded son Peter could get care unavailable in North Carolina. Phil and Harry's conversations would jump from Goethe to Goodman and from Blum to Blumenthal. Out of that relationship came Golden's tireless service to his temple. Secretary of the board. Author of the temple constitution. Classroom teacher. Writer of curricula.

After Phyllis and Phil moved to Michigan to spend the rest of his 100 years, Golden's warmest friends were Beth El members Dave and Bea Wallas.

Harry paid his temple dues just like the rest of us. When asked for additional funds, he volunteered to address public audiences arranged by Beth El and contribute his fees to the temple. Sound great? It did to Harry. But no one picked up on that offer to generate needed money. Golden was earning \$1,000 plus expenses for each of his nationwide lectures. Even one \$1,000 talk by Golden could pay a lot of temple bills. Ultimately, after being pestered for cash only, Golden quit Temple Beth El, considering temple officers at the time to be brainless ingrates. Through many years Harry found time to accept invitations to talk at Beth El, free of course, and usually preceded by a taste of bourbon from his flask as he got out of his car.

Harry and I were friends. I met him when the commanding officer of Morris Field sacked the editor of the base newspaper, *The Morris Code*, and handed me the job while continuing administration work in our tactical outfit, the 46th Bomb Group. It was printed in a grubby loft over the Railway Express office on Fourth Street and the railroad tracks downtown. I would go there to put the paper together and proofread the first copies off the press, the same old flatbed that produced *The Charlotte Labor Journal* and *The Carolina Israelite*. The only other people there were Henry Stalls, Ken Robertson and Harry Golden. After each of these disparate newspapers was printed, the three men would stand in the second floor bay window overlooking empty Fourth Street to sing old favorite Christian hymns at the tops of their voices. I was invited to join them and the bottle they shared. But I was in uniform, not all that familiar with the words, and recent corn liquor was not my first choice. Pity. They could have used a baritone.

Henry Stalls was a fine gentleman, quiet, never judging, a faithful champion of labor and an old-fashioned *etaoin shrdlu* Linotype operator who could replace a bad slug with a good one hot off his composing machine. Ken Robertson was a gregarious advertising salesman as the *sine qua non* of Harry's and Henry's newspapers. Ken would phone Charlotte businesses to sell \$5 or \$10 cards on the premise that Jewish or labor readership would pay off in response to the little ads. That simplistic plan worked to

keep Harry Golden, Henry Stalls and Ken Robertson eating for years.

Harry was intrigued by this Jewish soldier Klein writing and editing *The Morris Code* for thousands of Air Force personnel flying and percolating through the airbase near Charlotte—same runways as today’s Douglas Municipal Airport. Here were Harry, Henry and Walter pumping out three one-man newspapers in the same print shop. Golden asked me to write something for his paper. I did and he ran it as is.

Once, just for hell, Harry phoned Albert Einstein at his Princeton, NJ, home. “I’d like to publish the essence of your theory to my readers. They could surely handle more than $E = mc^2$ but still they are lay people. Would you give me an appropriate explanation?” Einstein had a sharp answer ready for Harry: “You come to Princeton and I’ll play it for you on my violin.”

A final word about Charlotte Jewish community inactivity during the integration movement. If it weren’t for Harry Golden, Charlotte and Temple Beth El would go through sociological history unnoticed. Rabbis, writers, political leaders of all faiths played it safe, including this writer. True, John Belk as many-term mayor did his noble best to keep Charlotte honest, polite and trouble-free during those tough times.

Otherwise it was little Harry Golden standing tall in a forest of adversity. Haters burned down his home in hope of murdering him. Deadly threats reached him by mail and phone, day and night. I watched black political leaders come to Charlotte for his counsel, money and hard work. He gave all that and more: major space in *The Carolina Israelite*, in his nationally syndicated column, in his mass mailings and speeches. Temple Beth El and Charlotte could have taken a little credit for Golden’s fearless, admirable work for black equality except for one thing: they were too busy fearing Harry’s next outspoken surprise.

Unspoken was an underlying sense that so long as one third of Charlotte’s population was black, that was minority enough for the prejudiced who might otherwise target Jews. Years later the emergence of a huge Spanish-speaking minority in the Carolinas seemed to insulate further our Jewish population from haters.

Let’s play a little game. It’s called, “Find a sign of Harry Golden in Temple Beth El.”

See any plaques or pictures on the wall? Notice any rooms named for him? Locate any documents or artifacts that evidence Golden’s many years of Beth El leadership? Ever attend a Sabbath service that honors our most famous member, or even mentions his name?

Funny thing about this man.

** Not so. Harry was born Herschel Goldhirsch in 1902 in Mikulintsy in eastern Galicia, the birthplace of his father Leib Goldhirsch.*

Sensational discovery: Harry Golden’s essay about Beth El

World-famous author Harry Golden wrote an essay about the faith and fate of the Jewish people and Temple Beth El in 1951. It had been lost in history for half a century.

Here it is, in its entirety. It appeared only once: in our 1951 yearbook, hidden in the temple files. Its title is *A Link in the Chain of Survival*.

This rare, brilliant document does not appear among the Golden archives assembled at UNC Charlotte.

So enjoy, enjoy!

“How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwellings, O Israel...

“General Erwin Rommel was pounding at the gates of Alexandria. A gas chamber was in operation at Dachau. A lime kiln had just been installed in Treblinka. In Vienna, an engineering firm was demonstrating its latest, improved incinerator having a capacity of 19 human beings an hour. And in Charlotte, North Carolina, six Jews were organizing a new congregation!

“The elements of time and place may change, but the pattern has remained the same, in every century and in every decade. At the moment of greatest sorrow a new synagogue. Out of the ashes of destruction a new school or a new academy. Out of the mental torment of betrayed and massacred brethren—a new temple. With the Jews, there is always ‘tomorrow.’ The historian tells us that after the final Roman conquest, only the wolves and hyenas were left alive to roam the countryside. But hardly had Emperor Hadrian been laid in his grave, when, out of nowhere, came bearded patriarchs who sat down and wept among the ruins, amidst the noise and laughter of their grandchildren.

“This is the Jewish culture, the culture of survival. What greater culture than that of having been contemporaneous with all of recorded history, a living witness to the rise and fall of civilizations, empires and peoples, many of whom have long since completed their cycle, and now sit in darkness.

“Thus, another link was forged in the Jewish chain of survival; in the darkest hour, a school at Jabneh, a seminary at Leipzig, a bas madrish in Yemen; an orthodox school in Kovno; a Reform temple in Charlotte; appropriately and significantly at the foot of the oldest mountain range on this planet, the North Carolina Black Hills.

“They called it Temple Beth El in 1942, and with its thirty members they sat in a civic club room of a hotel. Later they hired the rooms of a national fraternity.

“From the Hebrew Union College at Cincinnati they called a young rabbi, Philip Frankel. He had been Educational Field Director for his alma mater and this was to be his first pulpit. As he leaves us now for a pulpit in a larger city, there is a sense of appreciation that both the rabbi and the Temple have grown in stature and prestige together, inspired by mutual vision, mutual integrity and mutual devotion. And at the end of its eighth year Temple Beth El presents an aspect of understanding and dignity for its congregation and for the entire City of Charlotte, North Carolina.

“By 1947 they were ready to build a permanent edifice—in the most beautiful section of the city and with a membership now of 120 families. Temple Beth El was dedicated to the service of God and Israel. Now eight years old, yet with the mark of the ages upon it—eight years old; a change in the idiom; rituals hewn to the time and the place, and yet linked with the past as an endless chain, *a link in the chain of Jewish survival.*

“And as the new Rabbi Hershfield stands in the pulpit on the Sabbath, it could very well be the young rabbi at Thebes intoning the Sabbath prayer as Alexander was storming the gates; the sound of the kiddush could very well be the echo of the chant heard in the streets of Carthage as Scipio’s legions thundered through the city; and the irrevocable continuation of the evening service begun in the old Mill Street synagogue in New York in the year 1670.

“A link in the endless chain, forged in every age and in every land and in every language; an endless chain forged by the love of God and dedicated to the intellectual advancement of mankind.

“ ---Harry L. Golden”

1948 student play

We have another treasure in hand: a play presented April 26, 1948, by the senior Sunday school class of TBE.

“The Moment of Destiny” featured eight students and the temple choir working from a ten-page document written by Harry Golden. The cast:

Narrator	Joey Raff
Dreyfus	Elaine Taylor
Theodore Hertzl	Douglas Kahn
Emile Zola	Norma Madalia
World Opinion	Richard Bernstein
Max Nordau	Eddie Bernstein
Lord Rothschild	Caroline Weinstein
Jews of Munich	Carol Morgen
Menachem Ussisshkin	Frances Meiselman

The closing hymn, *Hatikvah*, was arranged by Jo Gottheimer leading the TBE choir.

The Blumenthals

I. D. Blumenthal was always Dick to his family. Blumenthal wasn't his ancestral name. His father Samuel and uncle Max adopted it when they came from Lithuania to New York to Savannah. In German it means, “valley of flowers.”

Samuel married Fanny Rocklin. They had six children: Dick, Ellis, Henrietta, Judith, Hannah and Herman.

Temple Beth El lives well today because of the steadfast determination of one Orthodox Jew to give Charlotte and the Carolinas a wholesome and promising Jewish future—whether Orthodox, Conservative or Reform. Dick Blumenthal was truly *driven* throughout his life to construct a strong, lasting center of Judaism in Charlotte. That manifested itself in many ways: Temple Israel, Temple Beth El, Wildacres, Circuit-Riding Rabbi, two day schools, Blumenthal Jewish Home for the Aged, *The Jewish Times Outlook*, the Blumenthal Foundation and Radiator Specialty Company. From all those entities Dick, with brother Herman always at his side, created a flow of faith that nourished the spirit of brotherhood, interfaith respect and religious enlightenment.

Bear in mind Dick Blumenthal settled in Charlotte in 1924, 18 years before Temple Beth El was born and not long after Arthur Goodman arrived. The closeness and mutual respect of Blumenthal and Goodman fueled the Reform movement in the Carolinas.

A classic photo shot April 1, 1929, shows 25 numbered Charlotte Jewish women and men in formal dress posing for history. Number 22 is Dick Blumenthal. *See page 152.*

Dick and Herman Blumenthal must have agreed early on to shepherd both Temple Israel and Temple Beth El so long as they were alive. Dick was to precipitate to Temple Israel and Herman to Temple Beth El. It worked well.

Dick married twice but there were no children. That never stopped Dick from picking up Charlotte Jewish children and delivering them to and from Shabbat morning services. Herman's wife Anita and children Alan, Philip and Samuel, were Dick's closest family.

Through two generations Herman would call me to see if I knew of someone who could take over as advertising and creative manager of Radiator Specialty Co. One of my recommendations was my friend George Einhardt. He had agreed to partner with me when I started my agency in 1948, but chose instead to take my place as art director of *The Charlotte Observer*. Well, George and Herman were a great match for years until George died. Then Herman was on the phone two or three times a year, thinking I had more winners to recommend. He would ask about Jewish candidates first, as when we began bringing Russian refugees to Charlotte. The Blumenthal family never forgot Maimonides' view of charitable acts with publicly given money near the bottom and giving work with dignity near the top.

Dick would give away sets of the early 12-volume Jewish Encyclopedia to people who needed and deserved them. He was founding president of the Charlotte Federation of Jewish Charities. When he opted to perform his second bar mitzvah, he chose Temple Beth El. The date was June 2, 1978. Dick was 83 then and in fine form. Our pulpit was loaded with Blumenthals as he recited his portion, Leviticus 26, in his southern-flavored Hebrew.

The Blumenthal family treasure, Wildacres Retreat, near Little Switzerland, NC, was always open to both Charlotte congregations, as well as to serving as a free conference center to educational, cultural and religious groups. If you were a leader of a music, art, mineral, religious, interfaith, civic or science group, you probably found yourself enjoying the 3,300-foot mountain jewel called Wildacres over many years. Thousands of Carolinians have photos of themselves among groups celebrating life, nature and faith there. Labor Day weekend has always been the time for Temple Beth El members to play and pray at Wildacres.

March 5, 1997, saw a splendid celebration at the North Carolina Performing Arts Center honoring Herman and Anita Blumenthal, and the memory of Dick, Marguerite and Madolyn, all of whom breathed life into Temple Beth El. NC Governor Jim Hunt and *Observer* editor Rolfe Neill spoke at the black tie dinner. Herman and Anita kicked off the "A Lifetime of Giving" temple endowment fund with \$1 million and their inspiration to continue it through years of success.

No one else lived the role of heart-and-soul of Temple Beth El as did Anita and Herman. No meeting was too minor or distant for them to attend and enhance. They never turned away from a challenge or issue.

They brought up their sons Alan, Philip and Samuel at Temple Beth El. They saw to it that their family faithfully worked for and attended services at this congregation. Herman turned down a national Reform position to focus on his temple. Anita was the star of our choir over many years, yet was always the team player. Through all of those years the love Anita and Herman gave to Temple Beth El was returned in full measure by its members and professionals.

Now, with the Dick and Herman generation gone, their steadfast descendants have not hesitated to continue their good works, keeping the doors of Wildacres open to interfaith understanding and their bonds to their faith and to Temple Beth El as strong as ever.

Bernard Baruch here as a boy

Bernard Baruch was financial counselor to all American presidents from Woodrow Wilson to Franklin D. Roosevelt.

His name is identified with his birthplace in Winnsboro, SC, in Camden and Georgetown where he entertained many world-famous figures like Winston Churchill.

Charlotte's early Reform Jewish community was part of his life, too. His uncle lived here. He hosted young Bernard through much of his boyhood. Some of the Charlotte Jews with whom he socialized were Louis N. Schiff, Jay Hirschinger, H. Bumgarten, Samuel Cohen, Solomon Cohen, David Goldberg and A. A. Nathan.

First president Leo Gottheimer

The first president and one of the founders of Temple Beth El was Leo Gottheimer.

Born December 14, 1888, in Athens, GA, Leo began selling pencils on the road for an Ybor City, FL, firm before becoming an executive with Southern Spring Bed Company in Charlotte.

Then in 1948, with his relatives Leo Finman and Bud Marx, he opened Leo's Delicatessen next to the Center theater. Two years later, success drove Leo's to Elizabeth avenue where a Jewish legend bloomed. For a while Leo's was the only source of bagels and pastrami in Charlotte.

At Beth El, Leo's singing wife Joan ("Jo") and daughter Rita were a family duet. Ultimately the Gottheimers moved to Atlanta, Portland and Great Neck—all except Ed Finman who remained firmly established in Charlotte.

While Leo's Delicatessen is no more, the sweet memory lingers on.

So does his birth list from a family bible, showing Emil Gottheimer being born April 4, 1844; Helena Gottheimer October 24, 1854; Gertrude Gottheimer March 3, 1874; Sara Gottheimer July 8, 1878; Harry Gottheimer, May 1, 1882; and grandchildren Albert, Enid, Amelia, Edward and Helena Glaser from 1899 to 1909.

His death May 1, 1973, in a Miami hospital, shook Temple Beth El. Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz conducted the funeral, with interment in Forest Lawn cemetery. Active pallbearers were Ed Finman, Ronald Liss, Arthur Goodman, Jr., Robert Schrader, Stanley Nabow and Marc Silverman. Honorary pallbearers were Hilbert Fuerstman, Howard Glazier, Frank Groves, Harry Golden, Dan Green, Leon Gutmann, Ben Jaffa, Sr., Dr. M. J. Lavitan, Wilson Lewith, Alvin London, Maurice Neiman, Paul Stewart, Israel Smith, Jay Reid, Harold M. Short, Sr., Stanley Slesinger, David Wallas, Joe Boyarsky, I. D. Blumenthal, Herman Blumenthal, Leo Finman, E. E. Packard, A. L. Melasky, Mark Bernstein, Walter Klein, Sidney Kosch, George Brownstein, Jules Buxbaum, Dr. David Citron, Eli Cohen, Hermann Cohen, Paul Fligel and officers and members of the Temple Beth El board.

Temple presidents

Temple Beth El

Leo Gottheimer 1943-46
George Seibert 1947
Harry Frohman 1948-49
Larry Madalia 1950-51
Herman Blumenthal 1952-54
Bertram Raff 1954-56
Sidney Kosch 1956-58
Emanuel Packard 1958-60
Walter J. Klein 1960-61
Irving Richek 1961-63
Mark Bernstein 1963-65
Harold Breitman 1963-65
Sidney I. Shapiro 1966-67
Carl Goldfarb 1967-69
Robert Yudell 1969-71
Ronald Liss 1971-73
Mark Rothman 1973-75
Maxwell Goldsmith 1975-77
Saul Edlein 1977-79
Robert Conn 1979-81
Mark Perlin 1981-83
Allen Gordon 1983-85

Temple Beth El v/Shalom

Sally Schrader 1985-88
William B. Grifenhagen 1988-89
Jeffrey S. Lyons 1989-91
Douglas K. Gentile 1991-92

Temple Beth El

Michael A. Gold 1992-94
Mitchell Rifkin 1994-96
Norman Levin 1996-98
Steve Menaker 1998-2000
Barbara Katz 2000-02
Larry Farber 2002-04
Fred Dumas 2004-06

Jonathan Howard 2006-08
Adam Bernstein 2008-10

Beth Shalom

Walter J. Klein 1970-72
Phil Anoff 1972-73
Richard Klein 1973-75
Albert Behar 1978-79
Allan S. Oxman 1975-80
Irwin Pepper 1980-83
Allan Sebotnick 1983
Edward Holt 1983-85
Leon H. Schwartz 1985
Michael C. Simon 1986

Sisterhood presidents

Joan Gottheimer 1943-45
Selma Melasky 1945-46
Phyllis Frohman 1946-47
Fan Schrader 1947-49
Lois Frankel 1950-51
Fay Green 1951-53
Irene Madalia 1953-54
Charlotte Glazier 1955-57
Anita Blumenthal 1957-59
Elizabeth Klein 1959-60
Trudy Packard 1960-61
Barbara Shapiro 1961-62
Jane Critz 1962-63
Ruth Slesinger 1963-65
Evelyn Weinstein 1965
Vivian Mallins 1965-67
Fay Green 1967-68
Judy Sutker, Paula Musler, Barbara Sklut and
Peggy Simon as a committee 1968-69
Judy Sutker 1969-71
Clarice Breitman 1971-73
Evelyn Liss 1973
Sandi Rothman 1974-75
Diggie Pesakoff 1975-76
Iris Friedlander, Sue Appelbaum, Gloria Goldberg

as a committee 1976-77
Sandi Rothman 1977-78
Sally Schrader 1978-81
Iris Friedlander 1981-83
Lee Blumenthal 1983-85
Judy Perlin 1985-86
Shirley Fytelson 1986-87
Honey Kridel 1987-88
Patti Winters 1989-90
Shirley Fytelson 1991-92
Seena Binder, Peggy Rovman 1992-93
Peggy Rovman 1993-94
Ana Resnik 1994-95
Sandra Friend 1995-96
Amy Montoni, Sue Klein 1997-78
Marissa Brooks, Tracy London 1999-2000
Lori Trapani, Kelly Markiewitz 2000-03
Ginny Rosenberg 2004-05
Ivy Saul 2005-08
Corine Bockenek 2008-

Brotherhood presidents

Julian Cone 1944
Harry Frohman 1945
Bertram Raff 1946-47
Ed Hirsch 1948
Paul Fligel 1949
Joe Cohen 1950
Sam Liss 1951
John Baron 1954-53
Robert Frank 1954
Leonard Sherwood 1955
Jules Buxbaum, Ronald Liss 1956
Sol Orlean, Howard Glazier 1957
Harry Sobell 1958
Victor Salvin 1959
Samuel Sansweet 1959-60
Aaron Jaffe 1960-61
Joseph Grifenhagen 1961
Manuel Kane 1961-62
Harold Henschel 1962-63

Stanley Slesinger 1963-64
Jack Lavitan 1964-65
Walter Finkelstein 1965-66
Sandy Ross 1966-68
Bob Tyson 1968-69
Saul Edlein 1969-71
Dick Helbein 1971
Barry Sklar, Orrin Nelson 1972-73
Murray Habbaz 1973-74
Alan Friedlander 1974-75
Tom Meacham 1975-76
Allen Gordon 1979-80
Robert Prior 1980-81
Alan Shuart 1981-83
Donald Livert 1984-85
Jay Kornberg 1986-87
Arnold Kridel 1988-92
Barry Frucht 1992-93
Peter Levinson 1993-94
Steve Katzenstein 1994-95
Howard Epstein 1995-99
Harvey Katowitz 1999-2001
Jeff Garis 2002-03
Herman Ziegler 2004-05
Andy Weingarten 2006-07
Jeff Cohen 2008
Brian Emery 2009

Norman Levin, busy leader

The year 1991 saw Norm Levin as a member of our temple executive board overseeing construction of its new complex.

Then he chaired the search committee that brought us Rabbi Jim Bennett. He served as president of our congregation from 1996 to 1998. He helped lead the Foundation of Shalom Park, the Charlotte Jewish Foundation and the Temple Beth El Permanent Endowment Fund Trust.

For years Norm worked out of a tiny office he made out of the temple cloak room.

Rabbi Alexander Schindler delivered the keynote address at the May 6, 2000, celebration honoring Norman Levin and the beginning of the era of A Lifetime of Giving.

Read what President Steven Menaker said that special night:

“...Temple Beth El has come a very long way in the past eight years, from moving into a new facility to more than doubling of our membership. We have been able to expand our programming and staff to

meet the diverse needs of Reform Jews in the Charlotte area.

“Much of the temple’s success has come from his financial support, his participation in the life of the temple and from the commitment of his leadership. Tonight we are recognizing the tireless and trusted commitment of Norman Levin. Before, during and after his presidency, Norman has made Temple Beth El a priority. Without his many hours of time spent working on dues issues, endowment solicitation and facilities maintenance, the temple would not be in the same position today.

“We are thankful to Norman and Donna and are excited that we can show them how much they have meant not only to Temple Beth El but also to the entire Jewish community. Your support and presence tonight means a great deal to the Levins and to the leadership and professionals of Temple Beth El... L’Chaim.”

The Richters of Mount Gilead

Sherry Levine Richter masterminded *A Serenade to Autumn*, an annual fashion event for the Charlotte Junior Women’s Club at Ovens Auditorium in the 1950s.

That success led to Sherry developing *A Cruise to Calypsoland*, an original concept traveling fashion show that earned \$1,000 for Temple Beth El.

Sherry teamed with Anita Blumenthal and Trudy Packard to produce a four-act show featuring fashions lent by Sidney Grossman of Lucielle’s, a ladies wear shop. Sherry narrated the script written by Eve Stewart, Anita, Trudy and herself. Nat Ades played piano and Manny Packard manned the drums.

Here are the names of all 41 Temple Beth El members and friends who dropped everything to stage *A Cruise to Calypsoland*: Anita Blumenthal, Trudy Packard, Sherry Richter, Eve Stewart, Marilyn Farwell, Louise Bogoff, Ruth Slesinger, GG Kosch, Estelle Cyrul, Marian Shubkin, Martin Allen, Bernice Altbach, Sandy Goodman, Elizabeth Klein, Elaine Deutsch, Charlotte Glazier, Evelyn Saunders, Frances Orlean, Bud Coira, Nat Ades, Phyllis Thrower, Miriam Bernstein, Manny Packard, Virginia Fechhelm, Jan Philipp, Joan Thalheimer, Marianne Lieberman, Peg Kootner, Dorothy Swerdloff, Sophie Mayer, Norman Pliner, Bill Thalheimer, Walter Klein, Victor Salvin, Ellen Helfgott, Joan Perretz, Yetta Richek, Sonia Reitzes, Hannah Nabow and Billie Grossman.

Sherry’s husband Bernard Richter and father-in-law Moses Richter revolutionized the marketing of American peaches, cooling them the moment they were picked within thousands of acres of North and South Carolina orchards. Simultaneously the Richter family operated United Mills to provide apparel for millions of women worldwide. Sons Benjamin and Lloyd and their families continue their Beth El identity and generosity.

Incredible Hilbert

During World War II, Paratrooper Hilbert Fuerstman would occasionally stay at Arthur and Katherine Goodman’s house when he was courting Mildred Miller.

While drying dishes one night, he told his host, “I think I’ll run down to New Orleans this weekend.”

The founder of Temple Beth El said, “Hilbert, that’s impossible.” Few days later Goodman received a card from Hilbert postmarked New Orleans. He’d even had time to call on an old friend of Goodman, who wasn’t aware Hilbert was known as the hitchhiking king of World War II men in uniform.

After the war, by now married to Mildred Miller and head of a remarkable family, he produced Beth El musical shows that wowed audiences while torturing the volunteer players. The temple rewarded him and his talented performers by including a handsome, well-equipped stage of their own in the new \$100 thousand social hall. (Children were grateful for that stage because they got to play behind the curtain, uninhibited, during oneg Shabbat.)

His productions were billed not as Off Broadway but as *Way* Off Broadway. The production team included Nat and Sue Ades, Norman Pliner, Marty Babenco, David Fuerstman and music by up-and-comers Lerner, Loewe, Rogers and Hammerstein.

But the star of stars was always director-producer Hilbert Fuerstman. He was at his best singing, *C’est Moi!*

In 1947 he conceived and managed what became the Dilworth Tennis Group, a sociological dream come true, putting together city courts and wishful players. Tennis would become a people’s sport in Charlotte, no longer limited to costly country club members.

He was famous for saying, “Put your money in the can.” That meant ante up 50 cents to help pay for the morning’s tennis balls. On his 80th birthday the media paused to honor him as he honored Charlotte as the city’s tennis ambassador. *See page 130.*

For years Fuerstman accepted the weighty burden of caring for our Hebrew Cemetery. What with death knocking at all hours, his time was never his own. He never complained, always listened, found ways to grin his grin. He is my personal hero because of what he did when I asked that the Charlotte Jewish community recognize its Confederate heritage.

After all, 13 dead Confederate Jews from the Mecklenburg region totaled more than the two who died in World War II, and were buried here. But the Cemetery board refused to accept the gift of a splendid monument honoring Charlotte’s Confederate Jews. They did not understand that without the monument, 13 historic graves would be virtually lost among more than a thousand others. They could not grasp the reality of three thousand Jewish men fighting on the Confederate side.

Whereupon Hilbert quit his job. He didn’t argue; he just quit.

When the board woke up to realize they had lost the one man who did all the work, they ate their words and asked Hilbert to come back. The monument was dedicated before a great crowd in a history-making event. *See page 147.* This is what heroes are made of.

Wait, I’m not finished.

Hilbert and I go way back. Though we both grew up near Newark in the glow of Temple B’nai Jeshurun, he and I didn’t meet until we both married Charlotte girls and spent (not quite) the rest of our lives here. Elizabeth and Mildred had been friends since childhood. We discovered his mother and my father had dated in younger days. And that we were both members of Jewish high school fraternities, albeit different ones.

We and our strings of kids were proud regulars at Beth El. Hilbert and Millie’s oldest, David, loved to hang out at our office on Elizabeth Avenue after school, fascinated by film production. When David

died young, it was our family tragedy, too. Their two singing daughters were friends, bridesmaids and performers at our children's weddings.

The Hilbert quality that most struck me was his being salesman-on-the-road, driving his car and himself hard, selling hosiery for Hermann Cohen, then watches, laughing at his own jokes, thinking always of his family back in Charlotte, doing all he could for Temple Beth El. Hilbert seemed to be made of solid brass to some, but to me he will always be solid gold.

Joe Boyarsky

Among early regulars at TBE were Joe and Nell Boyarsky, always seated up front at Sabbath evening services.

As assistant postmaster, Joe ran Charlotte's main post office for more than a generation. He was senior vice commander of the Queen City chapter of the Disabled American Veterans, like his buddy Arthur Goodman. Nell painted a handsome portrait of Joe which was exhibited for years at Beth El.

Joe and his family for many years personified interfaith marriage at Temple Beth El. Joe was Jewish. His wife Nell Reese Boyarsky was Protestant, as were all the Reeses.

Nell was a sister of Emma Quinn, Moira's mother. Bill Quinn, Moira's dad, is Catholic. Moira committed to the Jewish faith at Temple Beth El.

A teacher named Gladys

As Harry Golden wished to be remembered simply as a *reporter*, Gladys Lavitan might well like to be known simply as a *teacher*.

What a teacher! She stayed steadfastly in front of the class *for half a century* at Temple Beth El and Congregation Beth Shalom. If it's an understatement to call her teacher, then it's also an understatement to identify her as educational miracle worker. All her years were her best years. Ask her students. Gladys never had a moment's problem with student discipline or failure, words that were never in her professional vocabulary.

It was in the 1970s that Ms. Lavitan accepted Beth Shalom's invitation to be the first woman to take charge of a Charlotte synagogue pulpit one Shabbat after 28 years in the classroom. It was in December following her husband's guest leadership on the same pulpit two months earlier. This occurred before the first female rabbis, such as Sally Priesand, led services in Charlotte.

Her son and grandson were university law professors.

Gladys was best known in the Charlotte community as a Little Theater stage actress and broadcast performer. Her work has been so powerful and dependable that she usually had the lead part. And her memory? She is known for being called to take over a stage lead after the actress suddenly left town for a better offer. She had not understudied the part. Overnight she learned that part and performed flawlessly within 24 hours of hearing the news. Now *that's* memory.

So her accepting the lead part on the bimah of Beth Shalom Friday night was no challenge. She recited from the Holy Scriptures just as she had for generations on Sunday mornings and in guest appearances in local churches and civic groups.

One of Temple Beth El's first members was Max Kahn, father of Gladys. Max and one of his brothers arrived in Charlotte early in the 20th century.

Max moved away after his brother's murder, but luckily for Charlotte, he returned. He chaired the Charlotte Park and Recreation department, was elected to the city council and headed the county welfare board.

After her husband Jack died, Gladys opted to remain at their beloved 2527 Roswell Avenue home. She once considered moving, but she could never part with her thousands of books--or her memories.

Gladys Lavitan was one of many TBE teachers. If you were to check membership rolls, you would probably find at least one person in each family serving as a religious school teacher, sooner or later. In 1958, for example, our teaching staff included Ms. Gordon Winters, Ms. Eli Montezinos, Ms. Harold Breitman, Ms. Jack Karro, Ms. Fred Critz, Ms. Charles Kline, Ms. Irving Altbach, Harold Breitman, Hilbert Fuerstman, A. L. Melasky, Ms. Gil Lenett, Eli Montezinos, Dr. Charles Leighton, Mark Bernstein, Howard Glazier and Marc Ben-Joseph.

We dare not omit her countless book reviews. Whenever a group of readers assembles in Charlotte, their thoughts are of Gladys Lavitan. You choose the book from the large number she carries with her. The review is always sharp and smart. Not necessarily the book; Gladys tells it like it is.

Beth El honored her 90th birthday September 9, 2006. Here is an excerpt:

"Gladys has caused hundreds of our children to jump into the deep end of the Jewish pool of learning. Her students learned to adore their Jewish education every bit as much as they adored Gladys..."

Betty Crawford honored

No one ever doubted that the captain of the TBE ship was, for 25 years, Betty Crawford.

Never raised her voice. Never bossy. Never said she didn't have time.

Always loving. Always interested in you.

That was our Betty who was honored September 19, 2008, for her quarter-century of steadfast service managing the front office of Temple Beth El. To demonstrate their appreciation, 144 Beth El individuals, couples and organizations contributed to mark Betty's retirement.

Actually, this is an interfaith story. For while she represented Reform Judaism flawlessly, she is, was, always will be Roman Catholic. At the same time at least one member of Temple Beth El has worked for a Catholic church in Charlotte.

The artists among us

Draw your own conclusions. Our members have drawn just about everything else.

Temple Beth El treasures its artists and their exhibition-quality work. At its 40th anniversary reception January 27, 1983, works by 34 members were displayed:

Philip Bernstein, Marvin Bienstock, Nell Boyarsky, Ethel Burstein, Preston Scott Cohen, Richard Crown, Mark Edlein, Loni Elam, Jeff Huberman, Jill Isaacson, Laurel Isaacson, Betsy Klein, Robert Klein, GG Kosch, Helen Krantzler, Gladys Levine, Vickie Mallins, Jane Nelson, Howard Neumann, Vicki Neumann, Debbi Palefsky, Judy Perlin, Billie Raff, Betty Rosenbaum, Bud Rosenbaum, Peggy Rosenbaum, Wilma Saly, Rebecca Schwartz, Raenea Siegel, Betty Silver, Marla Solomon, Rona Steinberger, Anne Yudell and Emily Yudell.

Media included oil, collage, myrtlewood, pencil, clay tile, plaster, graphite, stoneware, terracotta, pen and ink, watercolor, linoleum block, etching, acrylic, handmade paper, colored pencil and mixed media.

Art consultants were Ben Pfingstag, Queens College assistant professor of art, and Richard Crown, Queens College associate professor of art. Larry Segal and Lou Coleman were technical assistants. The exhibition committee consisted of Louise Bernstein, Ethel Gordon, GG Kosch and Anne Yudell.

Other works by members today punctuate walls throughout the Beth El complex.

Girl scouts and boy cubs

If they were back together again today, the parents and children of Temple Beth El's and Temple Israel's Boy Scouts of American Cub pack 165 would rejoice as they first did in 1959.

Chairman was Bill Thalheimer, Rabbi Helfgott was institutional representative, Walter Klein was cubmaster and den mothers included Barbara Shapiro, Elizabeth Klein and Cathey Haines Sternberg.

In 1960 the cubs included Lance Berger, Philip Blumenthal, Robert Fligel, David Greenbaum, Robert Klein, Ned Kritzer, David Levenson, Alan Mann, Elliott Mann, Alan Nagle, Billy Packard, Shelly Retchin, Arthur Richek, Bobby Salvin, Sammy Schiffman, Ira Semanoff, Robert Shapiro and Mark Thalheimer.

Two patrols of Girl Scout Troop 197 and Sisterhood-sponsored Brownies were active and successful about the same time. Ms. Fred Fortress and Ms. J. Swerdloff led them and well.

Members that year were Alicia Babenco, Barbara Bober, Bonnie Bolno, Leslie Levine, Susan Litwak, Janice Luther, Margie Madans, Harriet Mayer, Maxine Mayer, Judy Rubin, Sherrie Beth Schreiber, Gay Slesinger, Barbara Stiller, Judy Swerdloff, Stephanie Swerdloff, Janet Weiner and Susan Zaro.

Both Charlotte Glazier and Fran Orlean distinguished themselves by heading the Hornets Nest Girl Scout Council, where Trudy Packard and Elizabeth Klein were board members. Trudy received the highest award given by the Council.

Senator Jesse Helms

Would the most famous US senator from North Carolina support Jews and Israel? His many detractors, including Jews, might be open-mouthed to learn his answer was a powerful *yes*.

Examples: FOR the freedom of Soviet Jews. And FOR NATO admission of the Czech Republic, when the petitioning ambassador was Jewish. His December 17, 1997, letter to me at Temple Beth El, read, "I had the pleasure of meeting with your cousin, Deputy Foreign Minister Karel Kovanda, during his recent trip to Washington, D.C. and found him to be a most enjoyable man. Moreover, I am pleased to be on the same side of NATO enlargement with both of you. Please continue to keep me informed of your views. I wish you and yours all the best in this holiday season..."

On May 8, 1973, Senator Helms wrote Beth Shalom Rabbi Mel Silverman *et al* the following: "Thank you for your very kind letter of recent date advising me of the plight of the three Russian Jewish physicists.

"I have been deeply concerned for some time now about the condition of Soviet Jews. Consequently, I am a cosponsor of the Jackson Amendment to the East-West Trade Bill, which would prohibit most favored nation status to the Soviet Union as long as it continues to place exorbitant immigrant taxes on its citizens. I will, of course, work diligently for the passage of this vital legislation..."

Many Helms stances conflicted with Reform Judaism, such as on African Americans and homosexuality. (One of our daughters would not drive past his house!)

It was said that Helms' mother was a resident of the Blumenthal Home in Greensboro.

The Jewish people should never forget to stand up for the friends they have made. Terry Sanford, NC governor and Duke University president, was one. The very day he became top administrator at Duke, he terminated the quota on Jewish admissions.

Another governor, Zebulon Vance, remains today the greatest North Carolina friend the Jews ever had.

A saga of survival

Born Suse Eckstein in Vienna. Educated in Berlin. Refugee in Prague. Trapped and sent to Theresienstadt. Then Auschwitz-Birkenau. Survived the Death March. Liberated by Americans in Schwerin. *All by the time she was 23 years old.*

She became Temple Beth El's, and the Charlotte community's, spokesperson for the six million Jewish men, women and children who did not survive the Holocaust.

Today she is best known as the highly honored Professor Emeritus Dr. Susan Cernyak-Spatz at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Fame

TBE members who have achieved stature in their fields include:

Literature: Harry Golden, author of *Only in America* and 20 other bestselling books, editor, columnist, champion of black rights

Television: Alan Burke, network commentator

Faith: Rabbi Judith Schindler, on her own and as daughter of world leader of Reform Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Sports: Anne Yudell, fastest woman in the world in her age bracket in 1998 in 100, 200 and 400 meter track

Sid Cojac, national senior tennis champion

Kathy Thiry, US Women's kata karate champion

Motion pictures: Anita Blumenthal, professional voice for Rita Hayworth and other Hollywood stars unable to sing

Charlotte Woman of the Year: Beatrice Wallas, 1959; Sis Atlass Kaplan, 1994; Marcia Simon, 1997; Emily Fairchild Zimmern, 2002

Our members really started something

Beth El members have been community, regional and national leaders from its earliest years.

Arthur Goodman founded the first humane society in Mecklenburg. He also headed the Disabled American Veterans of North Carolina. Bea Wallas co-founded the local League of Woman Voters.

Dottie Coplon founded the Southeast Coalition of Neighborhoods. Fran Orlean and Charlotte Glazier were presidents of the Hornets Nest Council of the Girl Scouts.

Stan Gertzman headed the Anti-Defamation League in Charlotte. Jacques Brouman led the Charlotte Symphony. Mark Bernstein was its president. And so was Rich Osborne.

Look who's here

What did Alex Schindler, Billy Graham and Abba Eban have in common?

All three world-famous men spoke from the pulpit of Temple Beth El in Charlotte.

So did Father Edward H. Flannery of Seton Hall University, the Catholic church's champion of improving relations with the Jewish people.

They can be seen and heard again

Volunteers have been documenting interviews of Charlotte Jewish leaders for many years. More than 200 videotapes and DVDs are on historic record today. The following Beth El members, past and present, can be heard and seen again. Check with the J library and ask to see the latest list of CAJE recorded interviews, which continue for the sake of history:

Ed Aberman
Mickey Aberman
Barbara Bernhardt
Mark Bernstein
Herman Blumenthal
Eli Cohen
Dorothy Coplon
Ed Finman
Hilbert Fuerstman
Carl Goldfarb
Katherine Goodman
Arthur Goodman, Jr.
Allen Gordon
Fay Green
Peggy Grifenhagen
Bill and Gloria Grifenhagen
Leon Gutmann
Hilda Malever Kirsner
Betsy Klein
Elizabeth and Walter Klein
Richard A. Klein
Robert P. Klein
Gladys Lavitan
A. L. Sonny Melasky
Paula Musler
Stanley Nabow
Judith Neiman
E. E. and Trudy Packard
Mark Perlin
Robert and Sally Schrader
Marcia Simon
Paul Simon
Hardy and Susan Spatz
Evelyn Bernstein Spielman
Eve and Paul Stewart

Life Presidents

Herman Blumenthal

Irving Richek

Norman Levin

Life Board Members

David Nabow

Leo Gottheimer

Shirley Fytelson

Thelma and Clarence Thacker

If past generations voted for the most beloved people at Temple Beth El, the Thackers would have won hands down. They were an institution in themselves as caretakers of our building.

All would agree they were a class act, fielding questions about food and air conditioning, planning b'nei mitzvah and socials. Whatever they did was done with warmth, personal concern and as a matched set.

Clarence died December 29, 1970. His January 1, 1971, funeral was held at Temple Beth El; it was one of the largest of its time. Rev. James McQuiston of Smallwood Presbyterian Church read from the New Testament, probably the only time that happened in the history of Temple Beth El. Even Billy Graham, speaking from the same bimah, didn't do that. Active pallbearers were Herman Blumenthal, Hilbert Fuerstman, Bernard Abrams, Ernest Witherspoon, Robert Yudell, Danny Martin, Wymon Griffin and F. M. Jones. He left his wife Thelma and three sons: Donald, Ronald and Jerome.

Thelma continued to serve through the years until her retirement, watching and serving the parade of members, professionals, school children and temple events with Thacker kindness.

Also unique in our history, Thelma was voted to be an honorary member of Temple Beth El. She has full lifelong voting rights and privileges.

Four babies named in one ceremony as all became Beth El 5th generation

Four babies were named in Temple Beth El by Rabbi Schindler on Friday, December 7, 2007:

Pasha and Devlin Levy, twin daughter and son of Chad and Amy Levy of New York, the grandchildren of Stanford Levy and Betsy Klein from Charlotte.

Adlai Martin, son of Ilana and Curtis Martin of Charlotte, grandson of Richard and Paula Klein.

Victoria Klein, daughter of Devin and Heidi Klein of Charlotte, granddaughter of Moira and Robert Klein.

And all are the great, great grandchildren of Arthur and Katherine Goodman, founders of Temple Beth El. They are four of the nine great grandchildren of Elizabeth and Walter Klein. It was a milestone in Temple Beth El's history, and unforgettable news for the Arthur Goodman family.

Member memories

I asked 60 long-time members for things that stuck in their Temple Beth El memories. You will find some of these responses to be unforgettable:

Terri Astren came back to Charlotte and stopped at Temple Beth El. "I think my Dad, George Seibert, was a president here. Have you heard of him?" No one did. Actually George was our second president, manager of Nelson Page jewelers uptown, whose elegant wife Ruth was an artist who died at 101. Terri moved back to Charlotte partly to relive her childhood here.

Sonny Melasky remembered that Lois Raff was the first Temple Beth El baby. And that membership grew from the first eight families in 1942 to 68 in 1946. Wife Selma remembered religious school teachers of the 1940s: Katherine Goodman, Claire Cohen, Bert Raff, Dorothy Gutmann, Aleen Hirsch and herself. They taught at Temple Israel before there was a Beth El.

Raenea and Sam Siegel thought about Rabbi Schindler's campaign to replace lost possessions of Louisiana hurricane survivors, directing a flow of food and furnishings to far-off strangers.

Annual specialty suppers were the original idea of Evelyn Bernstein Spielman. Everyone's favorite recipe came to life there. Though no one knew in advance what was coming in, each person got to eat a balanced meal.

Fay Green could never forget the wonderful relationship she had with Catholic Sister Mary Thomas Burke, which extended to Temple Beth El. "She taught Assertiveness Training and Value Systems at Central Piedmont Community College. Of the twelve Jewish women who took the class, five got divorced within a year!"

Bob and Anne Yudell thought back to a letter they received from Temple Beth El months before they moved to Charlotte that offered friendship and relocation help.

Retrospect isn't always pleasant. The Richter and Levin families in Mount Gilead tried to be

conscientious about driving their kids to religious school. That wasn't enough for Rabbi Gerber, who declined to perform a bar mitzvah because the parents missed driving to Charlotte a few Sunday mornings.

One Shabbat evening a passing car skidded in the rain and crashed into a utility pole right outside Beth El's first sanctuary. People were injured and carried inside. A highly respected Jewish physician was caught in the traffic. He asked what happened. Hearing of the injured, he and his wife drove off.

Deborah Klein Hammer remembered being married at Beth El by Rabbi Judy Schindler during a wild snowstorm five days before Judy's son Alec was born. Her childhood friend, now Father Shawn O'Neal, was a witness. So was the Beth El janitorial staff. So was Judy's husband Chip, there to look after her. And so were cantors Andrew Bernard and Elias Rooschvarg. The violinist was snowbound so a janitor offered to get his trombone (sic). Deborah still thinks it was the most beautiful wedding in history.

Rabbi Helfgott was remembered as an incurable smoker. He went through four packs of Kent cigarettes a day at temple and at home.

Oldtimers smile when the name Hermann Cohen comes up. He was Beth El's clown prince. He'd stand at a wall in front of children, whistle and push his head back, making his straw hat pop up, which wowed the kids. His jokes for grownups included, "He's a bachelor and comes from a long line of bachelors."

Herman Blumenthal was not known for joke telling. But he got smiles with this one. He and brother Dick accepted speaking engagements and were usually introduced with, "This is a man who has spent his entire life contributing funds to charitable causes." Herman's response: "Well, not *quite*."

One member beheld the sad scene of a huge pile of outdated prayer books behind the old temple as moving day came. They were stacked as trash, ready for garbage pickup.

Margaret Kottler was among women who worked on rummage sales as a major source of funds. So she staged one at Grier's Store and another in her home. At Grier's she and Renee Buxbaum were putting price tags on merchandise. Renee had tagged a sweater to be sold for 50 cents. It just happened to be the sweater Margaret had worn to the sale.

For more than a generation two angels, Betty Nagle and Grace Levitt, were there for the entire congregation to break-the-fast as the High Holy Days ended. Together they made all arrangements, prepared and served food and hosted those warmest of moments.

Before Shabbat services a congregant reminded Rabbi Bennett to mention the Six Million from the pulpit during *yahrzeit* so the congregation wouldn't forget. When he didn't, he was asked why. His response: "I forgot."

Four-year-old Kathy Klein asked her Mom, "How come Stevie Helfgott's father always gets to be the rabbi?"

It took an alert Beth El member to spot the newly laid monument at Hebrew Cemetery that displayed the entire Hebrew inscription *backwards*—and to have it fully reinscribed correctly for the bereaved Temple Israel family, who never noticed the mistake.

Observer readers smiled to read of Jeanne Levy enjoying her 105th birthday at Mecklenburg Health Care Center with her daughter Honey Kridel and a host of four generations of loving descendants from Texas, Arizona, California and Charlotte, a city always happy with its graduating seniors.

Ed Finman gets wistful when the word Leo's comes to mind. He knew his family restaurant and foodstore as headquarters for TBE and Temple Israel members. "Harry Golden was our best customer."

His lifetime friendships evolved from temple and Leo's restaurant—folks like Fred and Ethel Fortess, Jonathan Wallas, Lee Carlin, Robby Stern and the Swerdloffs—from the day the two Leos opened it in 1948. It was Ed who sadly sold it. But good times at Leo's remain unforgettable to the Charlotte Jewish community.

A singular jewel of all responses to my call for memories is this one from Mickey Aberman, long-time recording secretary of Temple Beth El:

"My involvement with Temple Beth El is comprised of an early period covering kindergarten through about a year after bar mitzvah at the building on Providence Road and then a few years at Beth Shalom before college, and then returning about ten years later as an adult living in Charlotte.

"In the first period, I was hauled up to Charlotte for religious school on Sundays. It was a longer trip then with no four-lane highways. I hated Sunday school. I did not get on well with the urban Jewish kids, who I thought were overly indulged and fairly exclusive. It was excruciating to sit in the basement classroom of that building listening to kids slowly reading Hebrew, "Ba ruch atah ado noi..." I would feel claustrophobic and get nauseated. At about age 11 I got expelled by Cantor Brown for poor attendance. My parents couldn't understand and thought he was being overly strict, since I had not missed that many days. Actually for a few months I had been getting out of the car, going down and sitting by the creek until almost time to go home, going back to the kitchen to hang with Thelma and Clarence for a little bit and then meeting my ride.

"I was much more connected during all of this time to Temple Beth Elohim in Charleston, where we were also members and lived during most summers. My Jewish friends were there (and several are pretty close friends to this day.) Even then I sensed a rootedness of the Jewish community in Charleston that was felt by the children. I did not sense that in Charlotte. I remember a conversation between a few Jewish kids comparing their shoplifting stories. I don't think the Charleston Jewish culture would have admitted bragging about shoplifting.

"My folks talked me back into the program, and my bar mitzvah preparation consisted of about eight weeks. I had a cassette tape of the whole service and I learned to perform what was on the tape. Around this time the rabbi and cantor had started requiring people to chant the prayers and the Torah portions. I did not want to do it. I liked reading it.

Cantor Brown insisted, and there would be no bar mitzvah unless I went along. I complied until the morning of the service when I read everything without chanting. I figured correctly that he would not stop me. Meanwhile I had proven in rehearsal that I could do the chanting if I wanted to, and I thought that Reform Judaism meant that you could choose your own way.

"My only other vivid memory was of having Gladys Lavitan as a Sunday school teacher. I recall actually wanting to attend during the time that she was my teacher.

Gladys taught bible and could read and tell stories in a way that was almost magical. Discussions about the stories were started with a question, "Why..." One ended with a good Socratic and the meanings of the story. I had her for two years (at least one at Beth Shalom.) She may have been the best teacher I had, secular or non-secular, through high school.

"At Beth Shalom, before its merger with Temple Beth El, I was in a three-student confirmation class. Rabbi Silverman taught the class and he focused on current ethical issues related to Jewish philosophical and legal writings. It was a Jewish education that I would wish for my children. (Topics such as philosophy,

ethics and history—particularly history of Reform Judaism and American Jewry—are crowded out of my children's curriculum by a smothering amount of Hebrew, ritual and Israel study.) We discussed, in the context of Talmud and 20th century Jewish thinkers: the Vietnam War, civil disobedience, intermarriage, poverty and departure from kashrut and other traditional observances..."

Our media people

Harry Golden does not shine alone in the Beth El firmament of authors, writers and media leaders. We had Stan and Sis Kaplan who developed WAYS into a radio powerhouse and published *The Leader* as a highly popular weekly newspaper. Dick Blumenthal bought the *Jewish Times Outlook* magazine and moved it from Greensboro to Charlotte. Bob Conn manned more than one desk at *The Charlotte Observer* for years. Martha London, Al's wife, was a long-term writer for *The Charlotte News*. Andrew Schorr served as a reporter for WBTV television. David Perlmutter and *The Charlotte Observer* are two inseparable names. Elliot Sanderson ran television station WTVI for years. And Stephen Udelson of WSOC is a Temple Beth El member.

City of salesmen

Beth El was born in a city of traveling salesmen. They were an entire class of heroes every bit as important to society as individual heroes. Historically, some Jewish peddlers became warehousemen, who became distributors, who became manufacturers. It happened on this border town that became a city, that became a regional market. Beth El grew from underdog to top dog. Today it is the largest Jewish congregation in the two Carolinas, in the largest city and market in the Carolinas.

Jewish traveling salesmen built our Charlotte Jewish community. They learned their Holy Scriptures from Gideon bibles in less-than-modest hotel rooms. Their dreams were of wives and kids they got to see only on weekends, as they thought back to their own Jewish childhood. They would drive harder on Fridays to get home in time for services, leading, with no small amount of pride, children to help fill a row of Beth El seats. Those animated kids would keep their sleepy fathers awake more than the sermon. (Beth El salesmen remembered kidding one another to draw eyes on their eyelids with their wives' eyebrow pencils so that when they sat on the pulpit, the congregation wouldn't realize they were asleep.)

There was a downside. Salesmen often moved on—transferred to better or worse territories, homesickness, career change, new bosses. Friendships that came to life at Temple Beth El could suddenly evaporate.

Duke Power's chief engineer stopped our school flooding

You could depend on one thing about our Temple's original building. When the creek next door flooded, our religious school flooded.

The basement was used alternately as the school and social hall. All-too frequent floods sent three feet of water into classrooms. Have you ever seen a piano float? Selma Melasky said her husband Sonny was house chairman during one of the floods. He went to inspect the damage to find our piano floating. Pupils celebrated as the board debated, "Who can we get to stop the flood waters? How about the chief engineer of Duke Power Company who designs and builds all those dams?"

All eyes turned to Dave Nabow. OK, he said. Then he asked, "How much money can we spend?" Would you believe the answer—"\$300?" This for a chief executive who spent hundreds of millions of dollars to dam the Catawba River?

Well, *he did it*, and stayed within the \$300 budget.

Later in life, thanks to Beth El member Dave Nabow, the public got to calling the Catawba River, "the best dammed river in America." Engineers of today still use his tech books, journals, microfilms and artifacts. Even his trusty 20-inch slide rule is displayed in the 6,000-square-foot Nabow Museum on the 6th floor of the Energy Building on Church street between First and Stonewall.

When Dave Nabow died, the president of Duke Power Company, Bill Lee, *up and quit*. He could not continue without the man who was at his side to nurture him throughout his career heading the largest utility in this part of America.

Our tie to Mecklenburg history

The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence was signed May 20, 1775, by 27 patriots at the square in Charlotte. To be descended from any of them is a badge of immense historic importance in these parts. It's akin to being connected to passengers on the Mayflower.

Well, Emma Reese may well be a direct descendant of David Reese, one of those 27 signers. Emma grew up with Elizabeth Goodman, daughter of Beth El founder Arthur Goodman. She worked next to me for many years in our motion picture production house on Carmel Road.

And Emma and Bill Quinn are parents of Moira, anticipated at this writing to become Temple Beth El President. Moira also has a grand Irish heritage through her Dad Bill Quinn, an everlasting friend of mine and television pioneer in Florence and Charlotte. Most important, Moira is by choice Jewish, which endows her with ties to the very beginnings of our faith.

Early families together again

It's October 19, 2001. Members of seven of our temple's first families assemble on our pulpit. They were all who surfaced for a touching photo. From left to right they are Mark Bernstein, Jane Melasky Diamond, Paul Stewart, Trudy Packard, Robert Schrader, Gladys Lavitan, Arthur Goodman, Jr., and Elizabeth Goodman Klein. *See page 123.*

Original members fade away

We try to keep senior members active in temple. But one classic case of failure is heart rending.

In 1998 there was a spirited effort for Rabbi Bennett to honor early and founding members and their families on our pulpit for one ultimate moment of recognition. Twenty-three original members and descendants of founders were located all over the south and east—as well as Charlotte.

But more important matters kept Temple Beth El from scheduling a firm date and making specific arrangements for a program. Sadly, many of those elders, once stirred up about the advent of their special reunion, were heartbroken when nothing came of it.

This invitation list of the 23 veterans, dated January 8, 1999, remains of the final reunion that never happened:

Selma Melasky. Jane Melasky Diamond. Betsy Melasky. Judith B. Neiman. Gwen Neiman. Edward Kahn. Hannah Silvers Rosenfeld. Ileene Silvers Wallace. Ed Finman. Gladys Lavitan. Arthur Goodman, Jr. Marc Silverman. Anne G. Hubbard. Elizabeth Goodman Klein. Trudy Packard. Walter Klein. Hilbert Fuerstman. Robert Schrader. Jean Maer. Rita Maer. Mark Bernstein. Paul Stewart.

As we buried Selma Melasky January 2, 2009, we were thankful for those still living.

As of publication date of *The Bridge Table*, we have in Charlotte only two people still alive who were actually present at the time Temple Beth El was born: *Gladys Lavitan and Elizabeth Klein*. A number of their descendants are alive and practicing their faith, in Charlotte and elsewhere. But these two originals are all Temple Beth El has left from the congregation's earliest days of 1942.

The Celanese phenomenon

The early 1960s saw an influx of members unlike anything before at Temple Beth El.

Executives of Celanese Corporation moved with their families to Charlotte with the construction of extensive new facilities in South Park. Jewish Celanese brass joined Temple Beth El almost unanimously.

They quickly assumed leadership and responsibilities. Warm, lasting friendships developed.

But in a few years Celanese ran into trouble. They closed their Charlotte operations and terminated all their people. The man selected to fire employees was then fired. Celanese Vice President Howard Philipp, a leader at Beth El, opted to retire for life. He and his wife Jan moved to Florida, bought a fine sailing craft and sailed out their lives on the world's seas.

The Rabbis

The Schindler name

When Judith Schindler was ordained a rabbi, her father's heart must have fairly burst with love and pride. All of a sudden the presence of two rabbis with the same family name was the source of conversational delight.

Both had fun saying to callers, "Which Rabbi Schindler do you want?" Family pride swelled to faith-wide pride when Alex and Rhea visited their daughter and her family in Charlotte. World-renown Reform leader Alexander Schindler loved to laugh and this which-Rabbi-Schindler fillip was a sweet source of smiles.

When Rabbi Alex Schindler spoke, his audiences listened. *A lot*. His definition of the word optimist was, "A person in the audience who starts to put his or her shoes back on when I say, 'and in conclusion.'"

He was a very good listener, too. It was suggested that a personal meeting between the leader of Chabad and the leader of Reform could develop into a new era in Judaism. He went right to work to make that happen. Twice. That nothing really came of it did not diminish his hope and passion for wondrous deeds.

Bearing the great name of her father was heavy as well as light for Rabbi Judy. She wanted in her heart to rise in public respect on her own but never to the point where she would even appear to capitalize on her father. It reminded me of the time my brother-in-law, Arthur Goodman, Jr., ran for public office after his father served three terms in the NC state house of representatives. He said, in all seriousness, "I'll never campaign using Dad's name."

In a car together Alex Schindler once volunteered his thinking about winning in tennis. "Just keep the ball in play as long as you can." He followed the same philosophy with his faith and his family.

Alex Schindler did something beautiful every High Holy Day season: he personally phoned every person in UAHC (URJ now) he considered vital to its future, such as his entire board. He chatted about personal things, never hurried. Always had family names at hand so he could send regards.

He died November 15, 2000, 27 years after his predecessor Maurice Eisendrath. A message was sent to UAHC Board Alumni. This is the heart of it:

"We lost a giant of our Movement this morning when Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the UAHC from 1973 to 1996, died in his sleep. Each of us, whether we worked with him personally or only know of his work from afar, has been deeply affected by his vision, wisdom and courage.

"Alex Schindler was an *Ohev Yisrael*—a lover of the people of Israel. As chairman of the Presidents' Conference of Major American Jewish Organizations during a difficult time for the State of Israel, he united the entire Jewish community, which rallied to his leadership. As a visionary leader of Reform Judaism, he declared his commitment to an inclusive, all-enfolding Judaism—which meant welcoming converts and embracing intermarried couples and integrating them into synagogue life. As a prophetic voice for social justice, he believed that Jews were obligated to apply the insights of their religious tradition to the problems of the society around them, and he spoke out forcefully for the poor, for civil rights and for gay rights. And throughout his long tenure, his was a voice of optimism and hope, and his leadership was

characterized by charisma, immense personal warmth and extraordinary poetic oratory. Many disagreed with Alex, some from within his movement and many outside his movement. But Jews everywhere, liberal and conservative, Orthodox and Hasidic, American and Israeli, loved and cherished him. Being in his presence was a joy, hearing him speak was a delight. His soaring vision brought us to new heights, and he will be sorely missed...

"Rabbi Schindler is survived by his wife Rhea and their children Elisa, Debra, Joshua Jonathan and Judith, and a sister Eva Oles...May his memory be a blessing." Judith Schindler's second son, named Alec, will carry the splendor of her father's life at least another 2,300 years into the future, just as the wonder of Alexander the Great lives on today.

Rabbi Judy's mother, Rhea Schindler, offers her perspective with these words. "My husband Alex and I had three children, two girls and a boy. We decided to have a fourth child. Imagine my surprise when I woke up from labor and discovered not one but two bundles of joy. The twins were born prematurely and Judy spent her first month in an incubator. She was named Judith Rachel—Judith for an aunt on my husband's side, who perished in the Holocaust, and Rachel from the Bible.

"Judy was and has always been a joy. She took special care in looking after her twin brother Jonathan to make sure that his homework was done, that he was ready for school and stayed out of trouble. I fondly remember our Shabbat dinners when Judy was a very little girl. Alex would turn to Judy and sing, 'From bough to bough, on every tree, a bird, two birds, sing merrily. And what does the bird sing, Judy?' and Judy would sing back, 'Shabbat Shabbat shalom, Shabbat Shabbat shalom.'

"Judy had a wonderful relationship with her father...He and I were very proud of her accomplishments, professionally and personally, as daughter, sister, wife, mother and aunt. Judy is one of those people who can do it all—with a full heart.

"I know that what makes Judy happiest is knowing that her family is healthy and happy, safe and secure. She takes the weight of the world on her shoulders and she makes the world a better place. I could not want more in a daughter than Judy."

Our rabbis

As a lasting record of those professionals who occupied the Temple Beth El pulpit for its first 66 years, and to honor their services to this congregation, we list them here. Even those of us who know the Beth El story quite well may forget the very first person who led services as a teenager starting December 12, 1942:

- Arthur Goodman, Jr. 1942-3
1. Philip Frankel 1943-1951
 2. Nathan Hershfield 1951-1953
 3. C. Melvin Helfgott 1953-1959
 4. Israel J. Gerber 1959-1972
 5. Bernard M. Zlotowitz 1972-1974
 6. Lawrence I. Jackofsky 1974-1976
 7. Harold I. Krantzler 1976-1986

8. Robert A. Seigel 1986-1992
9. Robert W. Shapiro 1992-1993
10. James M. Bennett 1993-2003
11. Adam Morris 1997-1999
12. Judith Schindler 1998-
13. Jessica Spitalnic 1999-2002
14. Jeremy Barras 2002-2007
15. Micah Streiffer 2007-

Beth Shalom

1. Melvin Silverman 1971-1974
2. Stanley Skolnik 1974-1975
3. Myra Soifer 1975-1977
4. Robert A. Seigel 1976-1986

You will see elsewhere in this book how profoundly Phil Frankel molded the future Temple Beth El. His eight years in Charlotte saw the evolution of both temple and rabbi into many more years of unforgettable service to our faith.

Rabbi Frankel and Lois left Charlotte for Lansing, MI, where he served most of his 100 years of life. After retirement there, he was rabbi five months each year at Temple Beth Israel of Longboat Key, FL, a fitting and sunny life climax for both Phil and Lois.

Last we heard, Rabbi Nathan Hershfield and Lotte were retired at 701 Farmington Avenue in West Hartford, CT. Beautiful Lotte had survived internment by the Japanese in the Philippines. But her husband could not survive at Beth El where harmony was more important to the congregants than enlightenment. Officers and board split in evaluating his effectiveness. Finally, financial support of TBE was threatened and Rabbi Hershfield was sent packing.

Rabbi Helfgott and wife Ellen, two of the kindest people Beth El members ever met, suffered cruelly for years as Mel's dementia and Ellen's cancer traveled with them from temple to temple until both died—Ellen December 25, 1973, and Mel September 19, 1975. We caught up with their four children March 3, 1994, when Steve was an attorney with a small firm in Cleveland, Janet was a social worker in Akron, Judy was single living in Columbus and working at the YMCA with pre-schoolers, and David was living in Indianapolis.

Rabbi Gerber, born Gertel, had the distinction of being rejected by both the revered Rabbi Jacob Rader Marcus, leader of HUC-JIR, and by Rabbi Dick Sternberger, head of the UAHC Mid Atlantic Region—and ultimately by his congregation. Gerber failed when he tried to convert Beth El from Reform to his vision of Orthodoxy. He was torn by his not having been graduated from a Reform seminary, by a wife who told him she would leave him rather than live anything but a Reform life, and by a father, a New York orthodox baker, who would not set foot inside Temple Beth El in spite of his son being its rabbi.

When the beloved Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz and Shirley left Beth El, he went into UAHC administration in the New York region. He gained fame when he associated with the German government as he investigated the amazing story of a Jewish cemetery worker, Martin Riesenburger, who saved the lives of 16,000 Berlin

Jews by sequestering them in his cemetery and acting as their rabbi throughout WWII.

Rabbi Larry Jackofsky had been our son Richard Klein's chaplain in the Army III Corps at Fort Hood, Killen, Texas. After his tour at Beth El, he became the director of the UAHF/URJ Southwest Council in Dallas, forever brave and true to his Washington Redskins in Cowboy territory. He serves as URJ staff liaison to the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods.

Rabbi Harold Krantzler was a significant part of the Charlotte community where he sang as a member of Charlotte Oratorio Singers. Whenever he and Helen spotted a piano in a member's home, they sat down to perform delightful duets by Gilbert and Sullivan, Rogers and Hammerstein and whatever you wished to hear.

Rabbi Robert Seigel settled and served in South Carolina close to his origins--and great memories such as tooling around Chapel Hill on his motorcycle as Hillel head at UNC before the Beth Shalom and Beth El pulpits. He resurfaces often in Charlotte to visit his family here, always among good friends.

Rabbi Robert Shapiro coincidentally took over the same pulpit held earlier by our first rabbi, Philip Frankel: Temple Beth Israel in Longboat Key, Florida. He wrote, "Beth El was one of the finest experiences of my rabbinic career."

Interim rabbis are not unusual at any temple—professionals who graciously step in to lead High Holy Day services while the pulpit is in transition. The historic standout at Beth El was Rabbi Solomon Foster, one of America's leading Reform rabbis and an example of walking Reform history.

A personal friend of Presidents Wilson, Hoover, Taft and Roosevelt, he shepherded Temple B'nai Jeshurun in Newark for 39 years, where Beth El members Hilbert Fuerstman and I attended—and where my grandmother Babette Klein was an early member who, Foster never forgot, threw him coins from her upstairs window as dues payments. In his day he presided at more than 1,000 b'nei mitzvah.

On the night of August 23, 1918, Foster caught enemy officers who secretly landed from a submarine in Lower New York Bay. A US Army chaplain stationed at Fort Hancock, NJ, he overheard—and understood—German voices in the lobby of the Sea View Hotel. After he reported the conversation, the government declared the entire New Jersey coast a war zone. The German officers were captured while a secret radio station was discovered a mile inland.

I asked Foster if he presided at funerals of members he did not respect. "Of course," he answered, "but I never told lies about them. I simply read my poems."

During Rabbi Jim Bennett's decade, Temple Beth El membership *doubled*. Outreach reached everyone. Healing attained higher meaning. And the congregation was firmly established as the largest synagogue in both Carolinas. He stays in touch with Beth El from his home in St. Louis, where he succeeded Rabbi Jeffrey Stiffman July 1, 2004, after 34 years leading Temple Shaare Emeth—a congregation in Creve Coeur with twice as many members as Temple Beth El. That congregation's Reform history began in 1869.

Rabbi Judith Schindler joined TBE as associate rabbi in 1998. Before that she was associate and assistant rabbi at Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, NY 1995-1998. She received her bachelor's degree in clinical psychology at Tufts in 1998 after three years' study in Israel and ordination at HUC-JIR in 1995. Married to Charles "Chip" Wallach, they have two sons, Maxwell Jeremy Wallach and Alee Franklin Wallach.

Then president Larry Farber wrote the congregation February 3, 2003, announcing he was appointing a rabbinic search committee to find a successor to Rabbi Bennett. "It is anticipated that we will spend from eight to ten months completing this process." This costly exercise came with Rabbi Judy Schindler already serving our congregation full time as the obvious sole candidate for the position.

An astounding choice

Hundreds of American newspapers, including *The Charlotte Observer*, carried the incredible story in October, 1998.

Rabbi A. James Rudin announced his choice of the ten most influential and inspiring spiritual leaders of the 20th century. He had revealed them one month earlier in the PBS-TV news program, *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*. This time he was writing in his syndicated column for the Religion News Service. He cited the Dalai Lama, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Ayatollah Khomeini, Martin Luther King, Jr., Reinhold Niebuhr, Pope John XXIII, Menachem Schneerson, Mother Teresa, Pope John Paul II, and Rabbi C. Melvyn Helfgott, for six years the rabbi of Temple Beth El in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Rudin said this: "C. Melvyn Helfgott was my childhood rabbi in Alexandria, VA. He deeply influenced my life and steered me to the rabbinate. I include him not because he was one of the giants of the century, but as an example that one doesn't have to be a global figure to be both 'influential and inspiring.' Thank you, Rabbi Helfgott."

When he heard about our posting the news of his choices in the TBE exhibit, Rudin wrote, "Thank you for the kind words about my article mentioning Rabbi Helfgott. When I next visit Charlotte, I will be sure to visit the Temple Beth El museum..."

In *The Charlotte Observer*, I wrote this: "Mel's been dead since the '60s. But every time his name is mentioned I'm transported back to the days he ministered to Temple Beth El here in Charlotte and I well up.

"He was such a beautiful, sensitive, vulnerable and unselfish human being. I wish we could clone his bones today and populate some innocent place like Vancouver Island with hundreds of C. Melvyn Helfgotts.

"That Rabbi A. James Rudin picked this modest gentleman as one of the 10 greatest religious leaders of all time is absolutely delicious (Oct. 12 Viewpoint: Religion & Ethics, 'Who are the century's top 10 religious figures?'). No one less than God Almighty must have entered Rabbi Rudin's head to suggest, quietly, that Rabbi Helfgott truly belongs on his list.

"I think of all the things Mel could not or would not do. He would not fight with anyone, no matter how wrong he thought the person was. He would not interrupt anyone. He would not say he didn't have time—time to visit the sick, time to come to a meeting, time to champion a congregation member's cause. He would not allow himself to be frustrated, even by his wife and mine when they were giggling together in the front row of a class he was teaching.

"His one secret was his first name. People would idly ask what the C stands for and he'd always decline. Once we nailed him hard until he had to 'fess up. He said the C stood for Calvin. Well, what's wrong with that? we asked. It was obvious to us that Calvin Coolidge was president of the United States

when Mel was born and that his Mom proudly named her son Calvin. But Mel felt some members of his temple would snicker at this rabbi being named for a great Christian leader, John Calvin.

“This man lived and breathed his service as a minister of God every day he held the Beth El pulpit. His officers and board loved him. But they never gave him a raise. Mel asked for raises a few times because he was getting—I’m not making this up--\$7,000 a year, and hoping for a \$3,000 raise. But his board knew he would cave in after the first No and not bring up the matter for another year. He and his magnificent wife Ellen managed to keep up a tiny house on Hanson Drive and raise four superb children on that miserable salary. And find a way to hold open house during the winter holidays, serving coffee, cookies and hot buttered chestnuts.

“You have to understand the Reform Jewish community in Charlotte was very small then. Mel would revel if as many as 50 attended his Sabbath evening services. But membership slowly grew to almost 200 when he left Charlotte. Leave? Why?

“Years later we heard the terrible truth. Mel, Ellen and the kids kept moving from town to town, losing friends and heart if not faith. Stories of his embarrassing forgetfulness abounded. Though various forms of dementia were known in those days, few people had personal contact with a victim nor had a name for it—Alzheimer’s disease.

“Elizabeth and I bumped into Mel at a UAHC convention in Los Angeles years after he left Charlotte. We hugged and laughed and told kind lies. That was the last we ever saw of one of the finest human beings we have known.

“The tragic news continued. Ellen’s mother in Sandusky, Ohio, always the queen of the family, died. Then lovely Ellen died of cancer, then Mel, leaving the four Helfgott children as orphans. Fred Leventhal, a fellow HUC-JIR board member in Cincinnati, heard of their plight and took them all in—not for a weekend, or a month, or a year, but *until they became adults*. Talk about heroes!

“Elizabeth and I think back to Mel on the High Holy Days, to Yom Kippur memorial services in the late afternoon. Mel would read all the names of the dead relatives of the congregation, as is the custom. Survivors would begin to weep for their dear ones. Soon our rabbi had tears in his eyes, too. He simply could not witness the suffering of his congregants without sharing their tears.

“That was C. Melvyn Helfgott. A modest man preaching in a city where religious giants walk. A city with a heart big enough for one gentle voice to be heard and remembered.”

A rabbi’s obligations

A congregation is larger than the sum of its parts. It is an institution created by its members to be an entity of wisdom, sensitivity and influence in its community.

So, too, is a rabbi. When for a decade I served on the board of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, I was occasionally invited to lecture on public relations to the classes of rabbinic candidates. The Q&A sessions that followed were revealing. “Why should I be criticized for going out for a beer with friends—friends I’ve made during my bi-weekly visits to minister to the congregation I’ve been assigned to?”

I answered that rabbis have obligations, whether sworn on Holy Scriptures, signed on a legally drawn document or simply understood. Such obligations include exemplary moral conduct. Honesty beyond question. Counseling confidence and wisdom.

Candidates would take positions of, “we’re only human” or “do you want us to take on a persona—a façade—for a weekend?” Or they would say, “these people want to let their hair down—what about my hair?”

Still at graduate student stage, they are given the burdens of wise old owls by people in need of professional attention. Not easy. But once that candidate becomes a lifelong professional, he or she is charged with true administration of a temple and those good-old-boy days are history. Rabbis are expected to be, must be, *different people for life*.

Rabbis are the travel guides for our guilt trips

Guilt is what Jews do best. Where would we be without it?

When we lose a parent or child or mate, our sense of guilt springs into action. We wonder if we spent proper time with them. We ask ourselves if we told them how much we loved them. Should we have been listening when we were talking? Could we have spared them the pain we gave them?

That may be why the institution of *yahrzeit* is so important in our lives. We have home prayer books and candles to see us through days of memories of dear ones we miss.

But it is the presence of a rabbi that calms the pains of guilt. A female rabbinic candidate told Elizabeth and me about one old member of a small congregation she visited biweekly. She could feel the ice in their relationship because he was visibly uncomfortable with her being a woman. Nevertheless he sat in her classes for months.

Then his wife suddenly died. The biweekly candidate came to him at once and said, “I understand how you feel and will ask at the seminary to send another rabbinic candidate who can better look after you.”

The man took her hand in his and said simply, “You are my rabbi.”

Choosing rabbis

Improper conduct ruins high professionals with low morals. Temple Beth El has not escaped such tragic events. Its rabbis have included one who used his office for, well, unofficial business.

Rabbi Dick Sternberger wisely and warmly led the Mid Atlantic Council of UAHC for many years. He was always there for TBE and 60 other congregations.

One rabbi in his domain was discovered with the wife of one his congregants. Simply moving that colleague to another city was not Dick’s idea of a proper remedy. He was a chaplain in the US Naval Reserve with the high rank of captain. He quickly arranged for the errant rabbi to be inducted into the

Navy and assigned to a ship outside the US for a full-term enlistment.

I cite these cases to remind ourselves that selecting rabbis for pulpits can not only be dicey but dangerous and costly to the future of a synagogue. Yes, there are saints and sinners in every corner of life. But such rationalization doesn't justify sugar-coating sour apples for thousands of Jewish families.

A compassionate story came from Texas. A congregation interviewed several candidates to fill its pulpit. One stuttered. After his tryout, his handicap stood in the way of his future there. They decided to give him a brief trial to see how things worked out.

The stuttering rabbi did just fine and so did the congregation. *He stayed for 40 years.*

Temple Beth El can be proud of rabbis who have served across its first 66 years. That admiration can be witnessed when rabbis travel with their officers to Reform conventions. If you are lucky you will see children spotting rabbis who once served their congregations. The kids laugh through their tears as they hug their beloved friends of earlier years.

Five professionals came from Beth El

Rabbi Frank Levin. Rabbi Janet Liss. Rabbi Lisa Vernon. Cantorial soloist Deborah Hammer. Education Director Susan Jacobs.

Their careers began at Temple Beth El. They are all a source of lasting pride.

Frank, son of Past President Norman and Donna Levin, was bar mitzvah here. He went on to become campus rabbi and director of Lubavitch House at the University of Pennsylvania.

Janet, daughter of Past President Rony Liss, was bat mitzvah and confirmed here. She went on to become rabbi of North Country Reform Temple, Glen Cove, NY. She was a product of the 2004 class of the Doctor of Ministry Program, the only faith-based initiative combined with advanced psychological training to be established within a Jewish seminary.

Lisa Vernon was our Education Director before becoming a Reform rabbi. She went on to teach at the Solomon Schechter Day School in West Orange, NJ.

Deborah, daughter of Richard and Paula Klein, was born in Charlotte and is a product of our religious school and choir. She has sung with the Beth Shalom choir of Fredericksburg, VA, since 1993 and has been acting cantor during high holy day services there since 1996.

Susan was educated at Temple Israel in Charlotte. Her grandparents, Ben and Blanche Jaffa, were here from the very beginning of Temple Beth El in 1942. They were the brother-in-law and sister of our founder, Arthur Goodman. Today she is our Education Director.

A gift from Rabbi Shillman

The name of Rabbi Samuel R. Shillman of Sumter, SC, is all but lost at Temple Beth El.

He was one professional who tried out for the first opening of the pulpit before Rabbi Philip Frankel

was retained. A German refugee from Winston-Salem was another.

He stayed at the home of Arthur and Katherine Goodman during his tryout weekend of January 1, 1943. He met the Goodman teenagers, Elizabeth and Arthur, Jr., and later sent Elizabeth a US Armed Forces Holy Scriptures as she left to attend Woman's College of UNC in Greensboro. It is inscribed, "Dear Elizabeth: Hope you enjoy every minute of your college work. Regards, Rabbi S. R. Shillma 9/15/43."

Funny story

The Central Conference of American Rabbis is the organization of all Reform rabbis in the United States. They retained our film production house to make and market a motion picture telling the story of the evolution of Reform rabbis. Called *Rabbi*, it won CCAR the highest award of the Public Relations Society of America.

Their top officers, led by President Joe Glaser, came from New York to gather at our Carmel Road offices one winter evening to view the interlock of the almost-finished film, for final changes.

Suddenly a number of costumed men wearing makeup burst through the front door and paraded into our conference room. Without a spoken word, they began a segue performance of several *Christmas carols*. The CCAR officers and we filmmakers sat open-mouthed, then stifling our laughs, as the chanters of Oasis Temple of the Shrine gave us their all.

It turned out this surprise was their way of honoring me as chairman of the Shrine Bowl Game of the Carolinas, a fundraising sports event of 50,000 Carolina Shriners for half a century.

When they finished singing, we broke the news to them that they had just serenaded the most unlikely audience of their lives. With that, the entire assembly laughed their hearts out.

Wall of honor

It took some doing, assembling matching photographs of all the rabbis and presidents of Temple Beth El and Congregation Beth Shalom. But we succeeded late in 1995. Now our members can see them all, properly honored in a special place of their own.

Our president is dead

Delegates from Charlotte's Beth El were there waiting in New York the evening of November 9, 1973. Seven hundred other leaders of Reform worldwide were there, too, dressed for the gala welcome and address of the UAHC president at the opening event of the biennial. Their impatience turned to alarm.

Backstage Maurice Eisendrath was dying. By next morning scheduled programs were shocked into dysfunction as word spread of the death of the leader of Reform Judaism who had stood at the helm for 23 years. "Nobody slept during his tenure," wrote Al Vorspan, "for he was a disturber of sleep who brought discomfort to the comfortable."

Goodbye, Dr. Marcus

Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus of Memphis and Cincinnati remains America's most beloved and remembered Reform rabbi. He did not wish to be president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, though the position was always there for him. Instead he fathered decades of rabbinic candidates into lifelong professional excellence. In that he eminently succeeded.

On December 5, 1988, he wrote, "Dear Elizabeth and Walter, You will be interested to know that today I received an award from the Cincinnati Institute of Fine Arts. They honored me because I have announced that I am publishing a four-volume history of the American Jew. This will be the first large-scale history written about the Jews in this country. I cover the period from 1776 to 1985. The first volume will come out some time in 1989 and the succeeding volumes will come out annually. The nicest thing that you can say to me is: 'Dr. Marcus, you should live so long.'

"With all good wishes for the holidays and with the hope that the new year will be a good year for all of us..."

His last of several letters to Temple Beth El was written April 5, 1995: "Dear Walter and Elizabeth, Thank you for the rum balls. They are magnificent and I am very grateful.

"Please excuse the brevity of this letter. As you know, I'm now 99, and I have problems of various sorts.

"I often think of you and I wish you all well. Cordially, JRM"

Thus climaxed Temple Beth El's long, sweet adventure with Dr. Marcus.

Music

Cantors and soloists

1. Peter Taormina
2. H. Richard Brown
3. Steven Haas
4. Morris Chotin
5. Jerry Helton
6. Dr. John Blizzard
7. Linda Shepherd
8. Andrew Bernard

He sang his way into our hearts

Dick Brown gave ten years of his life to Temple Beth El as cantor and educator.

He was a nationally known show business figure before coming to Charlotte, the singing star of the network hit show, *Stop the Music*, and top personality on the nightly TV show, *Be My Guest*.

But to Beth El congregants, Dick was a dream. Folks closed their eyes to listen more closely. He was a popular teacher, too. A difficult student was sent to Brown to get straightened out. "I have every right," the boy said, "to do what I want in religious school." Brown quietly replied, "You certainly do have rights and I will defend them. But I have rights, too—to flunk you."

Cantor Brown went on to become a rabbi up east. Rabbi H. Richard Brown died January 11, 2002.

Other voices are still remembered by senior congregants. Steve Haas was an opera pro; he comes back to Charlotte from time to time. John Blizzard is our High Holy Day regular as choir leader, soloist and cherished friend.

Another cantor is part of Temple Beth El history: Andrew Bernard. He makes musical history as he sings. He alone causes his audiences to *hum*, on and off, day and night, month after month. As they wake up musically they realize they are not reliving some old favorite song or treasured movie theme but Bernard's singing at last Friday night's services. Variations in mood, modulation and melody are uniquely, and unforgettably, his.

Two Melvin Cohens

Two unrelated men with the same name have distinguished themselves at Temple Beth El as well as the State of North Carolina.

The first Melvin Cohen is the political personality who has been ably serving as Mayor of the City of Morganton, NC, for 24 years, an all-time record. His uncle was Hermann Cohen, colorful early Temple

Beth El member, and brother of Mel's father Si Cohen. *The Charlotte Observer* often carries stories of Mayor Cohen's leadership in Burke County. He reports, "I grew up at Temple Beth El in Charlotte. I commuted every Sunday for my bar mitzvah there where Rabbi Helfgott prepared me." He's been a Mason for half of his 66 years. His father, two brothers and uncles were all Masons.

Mayor Cohen is the only NC Jewish mayor and a past president of the NC League of Municipalities. He identifies his uncle Hermann as an early peddler who went from town to town by bus to sell his hosiery lines.

Melvin Cohen number two was the musical personality, the beloved son of an early, faithful Beth El couple, Helen and Joseph Cohen. He earned a heartwarming headline when he closed Reliable Music at 650 East Stonewall street in November, 2001, after 38 years of serving 55,000 musicians in the Carolinas, plus Eric Clapton, Janis Joplin, The Who and the Allman Brothers Band:

The Day the Music Died at Old Reliable

He started the business behind his Dad's pawnshop on East Trade. The music life isn't the same now. Mel died in 2004 to be with his parents again.

Of organs, choirs and the color purple

Jews can be excused for acting irrationally when they perceive Jesus, organs and the color purple in their sanctuaries. That includes members of Temple Beth El.

Rabbi Gerber was hoodwinked by a team of nondescript strangers who got his permission to take over the pulpit one Sabbath evening and were well into a conversion pitch when he woke up to order them out of the building.

Many faithful Jews have a sense of history as keen as a dog's nose. Centuries of persecution by misguided Christians are as alive to them as if etched in their own memories. Temple Beth El has for years accepted the gracious hospitality of Saint Matthew Catholic church as it hosts certain High Holy Day services. To make that agreeable, the church sensitively covers sanctuary symbols and its priests welcome our congregation personally. But some members just can't find it comfortable attending Jewish services within a Roman Catholic church.

At Sabbath services in its own temple, Beth El's powerful electronic organ is played sparingly and its piano played instead—possibly because of the association with Christian practice.

As for the stigma of the color purple, the New Testament books of Mark, Luke, John, Acts and Revelation burn bright purple in the minds of Jews with such tragic quotations as, "Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe...when the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, crucify him..." Still, Jewish scriptures contain many positive references to purple—in Exodus, Numbers, Judges, Chronicles II, Esther, Proverbs, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

How does this relate to immoderate behavior at Temple Beth El? Its first musical instrument was a piano. An early Beth El president, Bert Raff, was deeply troubled by that piano, which, he pointed out,

had no biblical connection. Later a modest electric organ was bought with full board blessing. For many peaceful years thereafter Temple Beth El's devoted and talented choir was heard virtually every Friday night, always accompanied by its organ.

Today Beth El's powerful electronic organ is played well but sparingly. Cantor Andrew Bernard and his piano make an inseparable and winning duet.

The first musical voices heard in Temple Beth El were those of Jo Gottheimer and her daughter Rita. Later came Anita Blumenthal, Mildred Fuerstman, Eli and Beverly Montezinos, Nat and Sue Ades, GG Kosch, Gilbert Lenett, Yetta Richek, and Bea and Martin Babenco. Anita had sung professionally in Hollywood for her film producer uncle. Hers was the gorgeous voiceover for several stars who mouthed the words to Anita Sutker's voice track. By 1961 we had a formidable children's choir under Billie Grossman as director: Barbara Babenco, Robin Bolno, Mimi Buxbaum, Joan Critz, Sharon Gerber, Barry Hersh, Richard Klein, Harriet Kline, Randy Mann, David Montezinos, Arthur Richek, Robert Shapiro, Terry Shapiro, Joanne Travis, Laura Vitale and Sandra Vitale.

Today the Beth El choir, around 30 voices strong, is heard only on the High Holy Days and special occasions. But for most of the temple's 66 years, our choir sang *every Friday night*. That's the reason congregants didn't sing; they didn't want to compete. If anyone did elect to sing, congregants turned to see who it was. Not until Rabbi Krantzler assumed the pulpit did anyone encourage the membership to join in. And did they ever.

In the long history of Temple Beth El, only one choir singer or soloist seems destined to become president of the congregation: Moira Quinn Klein.

Temple culcha

The fun in fundraising at Beth El came at social events, like specialty suppers, raffles, musicals, rummage sales and fashion shows.

Cabaret night in February, 1952, was like that. Early cultural refinement was never better exemplified than in four can-can "girls"—Buster Hirsch, Harry Maer, David Zwanetz and Alex Sternberg (on TV he was Alan Burke). The actual singing ladies were Fay Green and Edna Ferster. The dancing duo were Roy Mitchell and Eve Stewart. *See page 142*

The Places

Location, location, location

The whereabouts of Temple Beth El deserve close attention.

The first Reform Jewish activity in Mecklenburg County, NC, occurred in the homes of a few German-heritage families many years before the late-1942 founding of the Beth El congregation.

The first assembly place was the midrise Hotel Charlotte at the corner of West Trade and Church streets. It was within walking distance of Hebrew United Brotherhood, Agudath Achim, on East Seventh street. But the doctrinal distance between them was miles apart.

After months in the hotel and promising growth in membership, the infant congregation rented a loft at 1412½ East Morehead Street over Dowtin's food store at the corner of Kings Drive. To raise funds to pay the rent, members staged spaghetti suppers with tickets costing \$1 each. After their member-cooked meals, the women played bridge and the men played poker. High holy day services were staged at the Masonic lodge building on the second block of South Tryon Street, a location arranged by Arthur Goodman, an active member of Phalanx 31 Masonic lodge. That fraternal courtesy continued until Temple Beth El opened its first free-standing sanctuary building at 1727 Providence Road in 1948.

The walk-up location on East Morehead had a life of its own. Before services one Friday night, Larry Madalia and Harry Frohman got in a fistfight on the bimah. Minutes later they had made up and participated in services. Next day they golfed together. Close friends losing it in temple? You figure.

Growth was on everyone's mind at Temple Beth El. Its membership committees worked over newly arrived families the way college fraternities tracked new students on campus. Temple Israel did not take that lying down. Both congregations resourcefully phoned and wrote families still living in Nutley, NJ, or Amherst, MA, who were known to be planning their move to Charlotte. Once here, the rush was on. Dinners at membership committee homes. Invitations to concerts, clubs and social spots. Once a newcomer opted for one temple or the other, they were dropped like the proverbial hot potato by the other congregation. And that hurt.

Beth El's success with recruitment led to two expansions of their building. The too-often flooding of classrooms in the basement led to a new, separate education building.

That happened none too soon. Enrollment of religious school children jumped to 200 by 1960. That first expansion led to a congregational sigh of relief. The first construction project at 1727 Providence Road proudly included a very large Star of David in the wall facing the highway. The idea was to create a jewel of a stained glass window with an appropriate scene from our Holy Scriptures. Unfortunately the artist wasn't Jewish. He created a scene showing Jesus delivering his Sermon on the Mount. To make it suitable for his Jewish customers, he gave Jesus a prominent nose.

Temple Beth El endured that shameful mistake for many years. Then in 1960 a dream came true with construction of Fellowship Hall. The stained glass window was removed and stored quietly. The \$100 thousand cost of Fellowship Hall led to the resignation of the treasurer, who was positive Beth El's finances would collapse. Later, after watching Fellowship Hall rise in fiscal integrity, he sheepishly asked me as president if I'd return the temple's financial documents and reinstate his job, which I was content to do.

That handsome new addition gave the congregation a spacious place for social affairs, oneg Shabbat celebrations and a real live stage for Hilbert Fuerstman to expand his delightful series of Broadway musical reviews. Those events featured surprisingly excellent talent he discovered within the congregation. After cajoling them into performing, he browbeat them through exhausting rehearsals. The cast toyed with murdering Fuerstman before adoring him for delivering success after success.

There are countless memories and character in the temple we left behind next to the creek on Providence Road, like the triple-hung windows that separated the sanctuary from multi-purpose rooms, the breezeway leading to the education building and the first little office off the bimah. Happily there was inspiration in saving the entire ark and eternal light to become the centerpiece of the new chapel.

Temple Beth El was alive in other locations.

Rabbi Philip Frankel volunteered to lead Jewish airmen and WACs through many Shabbat evening services at Morris Field's GI chapel during World War II. He managed to lead a full service there early Friday evenings before moving along to Beth El.

Remarkably that "temporary" Air Force chapel still stands in this city's air terminal area. It is in active use by Christian black and white residents. Additions and alterations have somewhat changed this once non-sectarian chapel of 1940s vintage. *See page 118*

Wildacres is another Beth El address. Thoughts keep coming back of idea-swapping, singing, finding children wandering into the sunset and strangers becoming friends at annual Wildacres retreats.

And then there was our priceless place at 1727 Providence Road. Mopping up the basement so Sunday school could resume on schedule. Sights and sounds of choir rehearsals and bat mitzvah recitations. Seeing dear friends we might otherwise never see soon again. Echoes of all facets of faith. That location will always be a hall of loving memories for the Beth El family.

One day Dick Blumenthal called and asked me to meet him and a realtor at Beth El. He had future expansion in mind and wanted Beth El to buy two adjacent residences. Negotiations began then and there and continued for weeks until the parties gave up, unable to agree on price. Had the plan succeeded, it might have delayed the ultimate move to Shalom Park.

The present Temple Beth El within 56-acre Shalom Park is large enough to seat 378 persons, expandable on High Holy Days to 1,100 through a system of sliding panels to include Silverman Social Hall.

Construction celebrations

The first groundbreaking ceremony in Temple Beth El's history happened June 18, 1948. Present were then-President Harry Frohman, First President Leo Gottheimer, Vice President Sonny Melasky and Secretary Harry Golden. Treasurer Bert Raff couldn't make it.

By January 14, 1949, the new building was ready for its first Shabbat service. The guest of honor for its dedication was Rabbi Samuel Goldensohn, rabbi emeritus of America's largest Reform congregation, Temple Emanu-El in New York City.

Social events tied to the guest's three-day visit were cancelled after the sudden tragic death of Philip G. Bernstein, father and grandfather of two Beth El presidents. Instead, a memorial service was held. Officers

present were President Harry Frohman, Vice President Sonny Melasky, Secretary Harry Golden and Past Presidents Leo Gottheimer, Larry Madalia and George Seibert. Hosting it all was Beth El Rabbi Nathan Hershfield.

Next was the initiation of the educational building August 6, 1954. Participating were Rabbi Mel Helfgott, President Bert Raff, First Vice President Sonny Melasky and Past President Herman Blumenthal.

June 7, 1991, saw a jubilant crowd of temple founders, officers and members symbolically to begin construction of the great Temple Beth El of today.

Among them were Rabbi Robert Seigel, Herman Blumenthal, Judy Neiman, Sonny and Selma Melasky, Lee and Jane Diamond, Robert and Moira Klein, Mickey Gold and Doug Gentile. Three generations were represented. The builders provided hard hats to prevent trouble and shiny new spades to make it.

We have just traveled through half a century of groundbreakings. They can be seen in the light of the flames that destroyed the Amity Country Club, the growing inadequacies of aging education buildings and changing physical needs of the Charlotte Jewish community.

Charlotte as a place to live

The noteworthy growth of Charlotte as a finance center drew Jewish bankers, lawyers and entrepreneurs. The collapse of the textile industry caused Charlotte to lose chemists, machinery dealers and salesmen.

The legendary wandering Jew is no legend. Jewish parents wedded to Charlotte may have their grown children living close to them but just as often their offspring now live in distant cities.

So we have this place called Charlotte that was, is and will be a high-traffic city where Jews are always on the move, at once nourishing and starving the community of their services, talents and commitment to their temple.

Jews born long ago in Charlotte couldn't spell bagel, no less find a fresh one. My sister Janice, on her way home to Maplewood, NJ, from Hollywood, FL, could gain entrance to our Charlotte home only by holding a bag of still-warm bagels. Even today Charlotte is less than famous for Jewish food, earning a rating of two shoulder-shrugs. But food stores, even dollar stores, are loaded with plainly marked kosher merchandise.

The prime rationale for Temple Beth El flourishing in Charlotte is not so much having a powerful presence for Reform as offering a meaningful future for all its Jewish families. Temple Beth El is alive online with a pitch to outsiders to come into the Carolina fold, to get a new life. They *come* in important numbers for prosperity, for green grass, for new friends, for climate comfort and for the JCC. They *leave* Charlotte because of long drives and stagnating business.

In the early days of Temple Beth El, members commented, "We see candidates for our pulpits as either on their way up their career ladder or on their way down. What we need is for Charlotte's Beth El pulpit to become their ultimate goal in life—worth staying put."

That may well have happened with Rabbi Judy. In 1864 Robert Browning wrote, in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*,
“Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made.
Our times are in his hand.”

Charlotte as a place to die

The finest piece of Charlotte Jewish historic journalism, in my mind, is a June, 2002, article by Diane Goldberg, *From the 18th to the 22nd Century—The Restoration and Expansion of Charlotte's Hebrew Cemetery*. Published by the Monument Builders of North America, *MB News* has only 1,000 readers, each paying \$125 for a one-year subscription.

It reported that our Hebrew Cemetery Association accepted the challenge to bring the 1870 institution into the 21st century and provide professional services to please the entire Jewish community. One person had the vision and motivation to make it all happen: William Gorelick. Today's Hebrew Cemetery is beautiful, well run, safe, convenient, accommodating to visitors and expandable from its present 1,000-plus graves. Other supporters have also contributed funds and annual dues for trees, the new front gate and maintenance personnel. But throughout its long history, no one person has so remarkably committed himself to this challenge as did William Gorelick.

The article also reported how United Daughters of the Confederacy members succeeded in placing Maltese crosses on Jewish Confederate graves but did not mention our association's historic refusal to bury non-Jews next to their spouses. That haunting practice drove many grieving Mecklenburg Jews to Forest Lawn East, Forest Lawn West and other cemeteries in the region.

It took 40 years of activism and threats of opening another Jewish cemetery to end this exclusion-in-death. With interfaith families in Charlotte becoming the majority, realism ultimately won the argument.

M.B. Smith, Al Smith, Morris Speizman, William Gorelick and other leaders across 131 years continue to be honored for their many years of devoted attention to the first obligation of every Jewish community.

Reverberation

Art and science often clash when it comes to designing and building auditoriums. A totally musical venue is a joy to build because voice perception does not enter into the equation. But it is hellish when a synagogue needs to serve members trying to hear the rabbi's sermon while seeking memorable musical experiences.

The ideal reverberation rate for voice quality is perhaps 1½ seconds. In contrast, there are churches in Europe where choirs enjoy a rate of eight seconds. But that is a killer for speakers needing to be understood.

Now translate that to Temple Beth El in Charlotte, North Carolina. Its sanctuary was intended to please everyone. Speakers, solo and choir singers, organ, piano and other instruments needed optimum

conditions. But one person's optimum is another's pitfall.

The architectural team at Beth El was told, "Please don't make a musical cemetery out of our new sanctuary, like Ovens Auditorium where music dropped dead before it reached the audience." They were also told, "Our sound system can enhance weak voices and override architectural failures."

Well, maybe. When Rabbi Judy Schindler took over her post in the new synagogue, she was greeted by complaints of unintelligibility. She worked long and hard on her delivery and achieving harmony with the room. She equipped herself with state-of-the-art devices so her voice would ring out strong and clear even when she talked as she walked. Results have been measurably good. And for the hearing impaired, Rabbi Judy personally delivers copies of her sermons to them, sometimes in advance.

An opposite example is Duke Chapel at Duke University. An extremely long and high room, it defies reasonable solutions to its voice perception problems. One was to equip all the drop lighting fixtures with loudspeakers.

Our marble ark

The temple complex of today was designed by Princeton Architectural Studio, a joint venture between Kehrt Shatken Sharon: Architects and Michael Landau Associates.

Our congregation was using the name Temple Beth El v'Shalom after the two temples united. The New Jersey Society of Architects presented their regional Architectural Award of Merit to these professionals on September 5, 1991. The award was made not only for the 19,000 square foot temple structure but its integration into the total Shalom Park site plan.

According to Ethel Gordon, what makes our new temple a talked-about showplace is the architects' out-of-the-box blend of old and new. They delighted in working with our classical marble ark, neatly mixing yesterday with today. It was rescued from a disbanded orthodox synagogue in Passaic, New Jersey, B'nai Jacob, at 112 Washington Place. It was the first synagogue in Passaic, founded February 25, 1889. The 30-by-30 foot structure *had to be cut into more than 100 pieces*, then shipped and reassembled by a Tennessee marble expert.

The ark image of two lions of Judah guarding the tablets of the law was a natural symbol for replication in temple publications and printing, thanks to Paul and Marcia Simon.

Take the *whole* tour

Willing to bet on whether you've seen all of Temple Beth El?

Most members, even our professionals and officers, have never done it all. They haven't seen the interesting storage room over the kitchen, accessible only by climbing a ladder. There you will discover long-forgotten treasures like the textile art donated by Stan and Sis Kaplan that once graced the sanctuary wall next to the bimah.

Have you seen the time capsule? No? You aren't alone. It's buried between the sanctuary and fellowship hall. Sorry, no marker or access. Paul Paskoff came up with the large container to fill with copies of the

Charlotte Jewish News and *The Voice*, kindergarten class drawings and photos.

Our balcony is rarely used other than serving as a vantage point for videographers documenting b'nei mitzvah. Some of us don't know we have a robing room behind the bimah. Members know where to hang their apparel as they enter, but have never visited all the professional offices next to that closet. One precious place to spend a moment is the children's retreat, endowed by the Melasky family.

Why look inside the kitchen freezer area? Why not? You might find next week's oneg surprises waiting.

The members who know the most about the newest TBE structure are those who contributed the funds to build and equip it. Memorials varied from the entire sanctuary given by the Blumenthal Foundation to the David Silverman Social Hall endowed by Marc and Mattye Silverman, from the organ costing a group of members \$80 thousand to trees at \$250 each. Mitch Rifkin and Ethel Gordon managed the memorial program.

The underwriters of the first 40 were the Blumenthal Foundation, Mr. and Ms. Marc Silverman, Michael Gold, Mr. and Ms. A. L. Melasky, Dr. and Ms. Matthew Gromet, Mr. and Ms. Walter Klein, Mr. and Ms. Bennett Lyons, Mr. and Ms. Jeffrey Lyons, Paul and Diane Spil, Samuel and Iris Spil, Morris & Linda Spil, Dr. and Ms. Alan Resnik, Mr. and Ms. Mitchell Rifkin, Mr. and Ms. Harry Rosenbaum, Jerry Segal, Dr. and Ms. Edwin Newman, Dr. Mark Perlin, Mr. and Ms. Norman Levin, Mr. and Ms. Benjamin Richter, Mr. and Ms. Lloyd Richter, Mr. and Ms. Alan Blumenthal, Mr. James Montag, Mr. and Ms. Michael Yaffe, Mr. Michael Diamond, Mr. and Ms. Peter Levinson, Mr. and Ms. Glen Rinderman, Dr. and Ms. Robert Yudell, Mr. and Ms. Allen Gordon, Mr. and Ms. Jerry Steinberg, Mr. and Ms. Alan Friedlander, Mr. and Ms. Fred B. Winton, Dr. and Ms. Gerald Berkowitz, Mr. and Ms. Donald Mallins, Mr. and Ms. Emery Szabo, Mr. and Ms. Daniel Seeman, Mr. Richard J. Osborne, Ms. Elise Ray, Mr. and Ms. Dick Zelikson and Mr. and Ms. Mark Rothman.

Some touches were personally created by members, like original artwork on the walls and the veil of sheer fabric that lightly obscures the Torahs in our ark.

The American Freedom Bell

When Dorothy Coplon heard about the world's largest ground-level bell being planned for Charlotte by a fellow Beth El member, she contacted me to say that the one right place for it was the Charlotte Museum of History, where we were both board members. She and Museum President Van Weatherspoon won out.

Today it hangs nobly in its own freestanding pavilion between Charlotte's newest museum and oldest home, the Hezekiah Alexander "palace" of 1774. Its first official ringing happened at the stroke of midnight as the year 2000 began. A crowd holding lighted candles was there, shivering and excited.

You can let freedom ring at any time by pressing the button on your computer at:

AmericanFreedomBell.org. Ring it, loud or soft, once or often, to your pleasure. Or drive to 3500 Shamrock Drive in the Plaza section to see, touch and hear it. No fee.

Education

Our love of learning

Education of our children and adults flows like blood in the veins of Temple Beth El. It is a driving passion that strongly explains the dynamic growth of this congregation.

The first teachers were veterans of the teaching pool at the Seventh Street synagogue. The first handful of children have evolved into many hundreds of students learning in Charlotte Jewish Preschool, Charlotte Jewish Day School, Tikvah Charlotte, Consolidated Hebrew High School and Temple Beth El Religious School.

A measure of success is the band of TBE teachers' assistants called *madrichim*, teenage former students who return as role models to teach and learn as well.

Tivkah Charlotte focuses on students with special needs. It is operated by Temple Beth El, Temple Israel and the Consolidated Hebrew High School of Jewish Studies.

Together these educational programs meet lifelong needs of all students objectively and subjectively.

Sunday morning adult discussion group

President Manny Packard got it started in 1959. Everything worked: guest experts showed up. The bagels and lox showed up. Parents of school children showed up.

It made sense to keep adults constructively busy while their children attended religious school, rather than let them drive off to nowhere. So they sat in for lectures of substance and worthwhile Q&A. Statesville shoe dealer Marvin Krieger led them, proud that he could display his open mind while hiding his opinions. Subjects moved from destruction of the temple to the dawn of Reform, from Maimonides to Spinoza, from Islam to Christianity. *Observer* columnist Kays Gary came to speak despite a killer cold.

Treasures of Temple Beth El

The most precious treasures of our congregation are not document or artifacts but the grand people who pray, play and pay there. Without them it's just real estate.

For seven years the chapel was home to an exhibit of the history of this congregation called *Treasures of Temple Beth El*, dedicated to the memory of Pauline and Jacob Klein. Before it opened, the chapel walls were lined with drab closed storage cabinets where High Holy Day prayer books, music and other publications were stored. The chapel served as a place for weddings, prayer, coaching b'nai mitzvot candidates and music rehearsals.

Countless members, visiting Jews and church groups paraded past new displays that included Temple Beth El's priceless Holocaust Torah. The sweetest thing in the chapel exhibit was—and still is—the ark

of the covenant from the temple's earlier home at 1727 Providence Road. Opening those doors ushers in memories of decades of early Beth El life.

The November, 2001, *Voice*, carried this announcement at the request of Rabbi Bennett:

"The Treasures of Temple Beth El are its members. The new permanent exhibit of our temple's history in the chapel does not pretend to be a museum. Rather it is a lively story of the evolution of this congregation told in 100 short stories laced with photos and artifacts.

"First our 10 closed storage cabinets were converted to glassed-in displays. Then came five months of research, writing, photography, assembly of documents and photos. Then exhibits were mounted and opened in time for the High Holy Days.

"Walking clockwise, the visitor sees people and events from the lone Jew Sir Francis Drake brought to Virginia in 1585 to Charlotte's reaction to the hate graffiti on our synagogue just a few weeks ago.

"There are surprises: a moving essay about Temple Beth El by Harry Golden hidden for half a century, the story of how our Rabbi Zlotowitz discovered a colleague who kept 16,000 Jews alive in Berlin throughout World War II, how our first service in December, 1942, was led by a 16-year-old boy, and how the member who built million dollar dams on the Catawba River got the job of stopping flooding of our Sunday school rooms on a \$300 budget.

"The exhibit is not without priceless objects: our Holocaust Torah from Brno, Moravia; the Melasky family Torah, and Charlotte's only Biblical garden library. Absent are two tons of Beth El records, archives, ledgers, books, magazines, bulletins and files now stored elsewhere.

"That made room for nice stories about Temple Beth El members and professionals from 1942 to today—about people performing acts of lovingkindness that enriched our temple and our faith."

Rabbi Bennett, Rabbi Schindler, administrator Arthur Kramer, presidents Fred Dumas and Jonathan Howard and the board—all encouraged and supported the project. On September 25, 2001, Rabbi Bennett wrote, "The Treasures of Temple Beth El are magnificent. I cannot thank you enough. I was overwhelmed at the rapid and impressive way the Treasures appeared in our chapel, almost by magic. Your grasp of the history of our congregation and its significance for the community is wonderful..." In May, 2004, Rabbi Judy Schindler wrote, "I especially love the archives you worked so hard to create." And in November, 2005, "I love the exhibit you have created and go in the chapel regularly to refer to the information in it."

At the request of Providence United Methodist Church, Temple Beth El presented them with a 13-point program in a talk April 23, 2003, to help them construct their own history exhibit modeled after ours.

But our 2008 building expansion plans, though healthily funded, did not provide for the continuation and expansion of *Treasures of Temple Beth El*. I was the last to know. Fortunately I rescued it in time for transformation into this book. Sixty-six years of precious documents, stories and artifacts had to disappear from public view. It was like watching your parents' graves bulldozed. But now the history of TBE lives again, out of harm's way, in *The Bridge Table*.

Toward a museum

“If Jesus returned, where would he go first?” That’s a familiar postulation that Jews like to respond with, “Why, any synagogue, where Hebrew and Aramaic languages, Jewish religious practices, even names and faces would be familiar.”

But what if the founders of Reform in Germany and America returned, what would they find at Temple Beth El?

A few faint voices crying for return of Classic Reform might echo in our great halls. The practice of Reform has evolved into what Reform Jews want today, which includes the principles of change and variety to fit contemporary needs and wishes. Specifically, though, where can members and visitors find our own early prayer books, portraits and write-ups about our early religious and secular leadership, stories about the birth, growth and evolution of our people?

World fame has so far touched but one Beth El member in all its 66 years—Harry Golden. So where are his pictures, his 20-some books, his classroom curricula, meeting minutes, constitution, newspaper columns? In UNC Charlotte, yes. But *not* in Temple Beth El, which could use a proper museum like other synagogues.

To outsiders we might resemble teenagers who believe life on earth did not begin until they were born. Some Beth El folk do think history is the quaint realm of aging people seeking entertainment in the past instead of productivity in the future. They don’t see wisdom in being told that some of today’s problems were already solved in the past.

And then there is reading material. In today’s world, most non-fiction books are bought, skimmed, shelved. History is thus returned to the past from whence it came.

An impressive number of American synagogues have museums and books devoted to their own history. Nearby Charleston’s Beth Elohim, with its centuries-long Jewish history, museum and 15 or more books written about it, is a splendid example with structures filled with archival treasures. Charlotte’s Beth El has been no example at all.*

After our chapel exhibit enjoyed many years of tours by Charlotte Jews and church members, it died when its future was declared ended. Temple Beth El was left with a few pictures on the walls, limited online history description and fuzzy plans for a kiosk somewhere.

“Our Early History” is given precisely 199 words—three words for each year of its life.

** Curiously, Congregation Beth Shalom received generous coverage in the hardcover memoir of Rabbi Mel Silverman. Titled, “Born Jewish...Becoming a Jew,” this 458-page book published in 2008 devotes 25 of those pages to his years in the Beth Shalom pulpit, even to the time he met with Rabbi Judy Schindler in a recent enjoyable revisit.*

Faith

Perspective on American Reform

“Yes, I am a Jew, and when the ancestors of the right honorable gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the temple of Solomon.”

That was Benjamin Disraeli’s savory response to a taunt. Now to paraphrase it, “When Charlotte’s Jews were swinging from tree to tree, Charleston’s were priests in the temple of Solomon.”

Consider this official information from Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim:

“Beth Elohim is acknowledged as the cradle of Reform in the United States. In 1824 a sizeable group of congregants, 47 in number, petitioned the Adjunta (Board of Trustees) of the synagogue to change the Sephardic Orthodox liturgy. The petition, which asked abridgement of the Hebrew ritual, English translation of the prayers, and a sermon in English, was denied. The disappointed liberal members thereupon resigned from the congregation and organized ‘The Reformed Society of Israelites.’ The society, influenced by the ideas of the Hamburg Reform congregation, the leading modernist community in Europe, lasted only nine years, but many of its practices and principles have become part of today’s Reform Judaism. The progressives rejoined the old congregation, and while the present temple was being built in 1840, an organ was installed. With the first service in the new temple, a liberalized ritual was introduced, and aside from being the first synagogue in America to include instrumental music in worship, Beth Elohim became in 1841 the first Reform congregation in the United States. It was one of the founding synagogues of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1873 and remains firmly and proudly committed to Reform Judaism.

“Today KKBE is the oldest surviving Reform synagogue in all the world, those in Europe having been destroyed in the Holocaust.”

Temple Beth El came to life in Charlotte in 1942. Kahol Kadosh Beth Elohim was born in Charleston in 1750, 192 years earlier. Members of Temple Beth El in Charlotte today can drive three interstate hours south to reach a city that began practicing Reform Judaism 118 years earlier. Indeed, Rabbi Robert Seigel took pride in leading a Hadassah group to his home town of Charleston to tour Beth Elohim, historic cemeteries and other Jewish points of interest. He reminded people he did not serve in a pulpit there.

The Charleston Jewish community reports that at least 15 books have been published about KK Beth Elohim. In humble contrast, the Charlotte Reform community was briefly documented in Morris Speizman’s remarkable *The Jews of Charlotte* in 1978. This book, *The Bridge Table*, is the first about Temple Beth El.

Evolution of our practice

The first 66 years of this congregation’s history have seen natural and orderly changes in its religious practices. Because we are an American Reform temple, we take pride and pleasure in our evolution and look forward to its dynamic continuation.

Reform is not in continuous search for the One Right Practice. Nor do we see ourselves in a process of maturation. Our allies in other branches of Judaism may not fully appreciate that reality, but real it is.

We have, in good order and with quiet wisdom, moved from one prayer book to the next, always in coordination with the UAHC/URJ, the governing body of our faith. Our newest prayer book, *Mishkan T'filah*, will surely be replaced one day, just as the 1857 *Minhag American* was replaced. To resist change would be unwise. An example is the ghost of Classical Reform.

Out of sentimental affection or just plain preference, some Beth El members—and a few Reform Jews worldwide—have stubbornly clung to Classical Reform like some family heirloom. Behind that position is a real concern, the one that lit the fire of Reform in Seesen, Hamburg and Berlin between 1810 and 1820: the language. The hallmark of Reform was always vernacularism.

One alumnus of Beth El is Steve Naman. He and Shari lived in Houston, Atlanta, Dallas, Old Greenwich, CT, Greenville, SC, Jacksonville and Charlotte before retiring to Ponte Vedra Beach, FL. He has been wedded to the American Council for Judaism as were his father and grandfather, championing Classical Reform principles, disagreeing with Zionism and praying with the Union Prayer Book, to the point where he became president of ACJ.

“Too much Hebrew” is a three-word anthem that has marched with Classical Reform since ACJ 1943 inception, just months after Temple Beth El was born. Our rabbis and scholars have consistently taken a scholarly stance: the more we study our writings in their original Hebrew and Aramaic, the fuller our understanding. Harry Orlinsky was the world-class expert to whom Christian publishers would turn every time a new Biblical text was published. He considered his work not only delightful but easy, since to him there was nothing to translate. People turned to him to understand what “vanity of vanities” meant only because they did not live in his world of Hebrew and Aramaic.

(Harry called me “Velvel Too.” He had a son also named Walter, which translates as Velvel, so he anointed me with family affection.)

Throughout two centuries of Reform, prayer books have been published in the language of the country as well as Hebrew, with liberal sprinkling of transliterations to help readers.

But more than language is involved in the evolution of American Reform Judaism.

More than half of Beth El's members are now interfaith. Rather than bending toward concessions to Christianity and other faiths, we are taking the path of Jewish uniqueness.

We strongly identify with the reality of Israel and its people, traveling to and communicating with Israel constantly. B'nei mitzvah are part and parcel of our children's lives. Circumcision is an absolute. While not necessarily following the laws of Kashrut, we respect those who do. Robed choirs, organs and hymnals have taken a back seat to building Israel as the Jewish homeland and a dynamic Temple Beth El as the focus of our faith. We remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

Practicing equality for women and Jews by choice

Beth El and Beth Shalom have taken historic leads in equality for women and for Jews by choice.

Fan Schrader was an early TBE sisterhood president. And so was her daughter-in-law Sally Schrader.

Sally was also elected Temple Beth El's first woman president, and for four years at that. She turned that post into a full-time executive position. Among her accomplishments was the historic reunion of Temple Beth El with Congregation Beth Shalom.

Through many years Sally was one of the leaders rescuing Russian Jews and melding them successfully into the Charlotte community.

With Moira Quinn Klein in line for the Beth El presidency, she would be the third woman *and* Jew-by-choice to attain that esteemed office.

Rabbi Sally Priesand visited and Rabbi Myra Soifer practiced here years before female professionals were seen on Jewish pulpits anywhere. At Beth Shalom Gladys Lavitan was the first woman to lead a service from a Charlotte pulpit. Our congregations quickly adopted the then-new Reform prayer book that opened the door to gender-free pulpit practice and language. Our professionals conscientiously changed prayers and music to avoid male personification of God and never turned back.

Temple Beth El pays its female professionals and staff on an equal basis, a policy that is anything but universal.

The Charlotte News of May 7, 1971, carried a story about a convert to Judaism conducting services at Beth Shalom that night at Shalom Hall of Myers Park Baptist Church. Harold H. Mark came to Charlotte in 1966 as a chemist for the Celanese Corporation. His father was Jewish, his mother Lutheran. He was reared in his mother's faith. While in textile school in Germany, the Nazis seized his Jewish roommate and took Mark as well when he said his father also was Jewish. After eight weeks in a concentration camp, Mark was released on his promise to leave Germany. He converted in 1950 to his father's religion while living in Raleigh, NC.

Interfaith in action

The night was cold and snowy. A crowd bunched up in the parking lot of the early Temple Beth. The fate of Russian Jews was on their troubled minds. They were talking and praying.

Near the back was one man, his overcoat hiding part of his face. He was not on the agenda. He had no say. He simply wanted to be there.

His name was Gene Owens, senior minister at Myers Park Baptist Church.

Charlotte church leaders and professionals have been like that throughout the 66 years of Temple Beth El's life. Countless times in countless ways they have reached out to stand with us and speak up for us. They invite us to speak at their services and to guest teach their Sunday school children.

And when they or we are in trouble, we help one another, for we know we can depend on each other.

It happened years ago at St. Peter's Protestant Episcopal Church at the corner of 7th street and North Tryon. According to its warden, the church was built in 1892 with two stars of David over its doors as recognition by the church of its Jewish roots. When those stone stars degraded, Temple Beth El stepped in to help pay for their restoration.

Many a synagogue bears such emblems of faith. But on a church it is surely a rarity anywhere in America.

There are sweet examples of one faith reaching out to other faiths. Here is a letter dated November 12, 1998, from Saint Anne School: "Thank you so much for a delightful tour of Temple Beth El. The students really enjoyed it and we all learned so much.

"Enclosed is a donation, a small token of appreciation for your time. I have visited your temple several times over the last few years. It never ceased to amaze me at how simple and yet beautiful the Jewish faith and customs are. We came away convinced that we should toss out the collection plate and spend our flower money on the poor! We can learn so much from each other..."

E pluribus unum

There are 898 Reform Jewish congregations in the United States and Canada as of this writing that are affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism. Temple Beth El is not only the largest Reform presence but also the largest Jewish congregation of all branches of Judaism in the two Carolinas. Here are all 33 Reform congregations, in city ABC order:

North Carolina

Congregation Beth HaTephila, Asheville
Boone Jewish Community, Boone
Brevard Jewish Community, Brevard
Beth Shalom, Cary
Temple Beth El, Charlotte
Temple Or Olam, Concord
Lake Norman Jewish Congregation, Davidson
Judea Reform Congregation, Durham
Temple Emmanuel, Gastonia
Temple Emanuel, Greensboro
Agudas Israel, Hendersonville
Temple Beth Shalom, Hickory
B'nai Israel, High Point
Beth Shalom, Sandhills Jewish Congregation, Jackson Springs
B'nai Israel, Kinston
Temple B'nai Sholem, New Bern
Beth Or, Raleigh
Temple Beth El, Rocky Mount
Temple Israel, Salisbury

Temple of Israel, Wilmington
Congregation Emanuel, Winston-Salem

South Carolina

Congregation of Adas Yeshurun, Aiken
Temple B'nai Israel, Anderson
Temple Beth El, Camden
Kahal Kodosh Beth Elohim, Charleston
Tree of Life Congregation, Columbia
Beth Israel Congregation, Florence
Temple Beth Elohim, Georgetown
Temple of Israel, Greenville
Congregation Beth Am, Hilton Head
Temple Shalom, Myrtle Beach
Temple B'nai Israel, Spartanburg
Temple Sinai, Sumter

Moira

Moira Quinn Klein's anticipated position as president would be timely and appropriate.

More than half of Temple Beth El's membership now consists of families in which one adult was born in a faith other than Judaism. Interfaith marriages are now much more prevalent than the earlier years when they were treated as a special minority.

Moira Quinn Klein as probable president is a Jew by choice, after birth and early life in a non-Jewish home. Her Dad, Bill Quinn, is proud of and pleased with his family's Roman Catholic heritage. It pleased her mother, Emma Reese Quinn, to convert to her husband's faith from her Protestant heritage. Moira spent years of introspection and contemplation before committing herself to the Jewish faith from the pulpit of Temple Beth El, and continuing to raise her sons Paul Devin and David Klein as active Jews.

After that promise to herself and to the Jewish faith, she has set a record for service to Charlotte's Jewish community.

Administration

Leadership cross-pollination

For the record, Temple Israel, Temple Beth El, Chabad and other area congregations have an admirable record of their leaders reaching across the aisle to help their sister congregations and organizations.

Alan Oxman, for example, served five years as president of Beth Shalom and later as president of Temple Israel. Arthur Goodman was president of Hebrew United Brotherhood before he founded TBE. Fundraising, brotherhood activities and Israel celebrations are frequently led and supported mutually.

Leadership qualifications

Today TBE has its year-long Robyn Farber leadership training program with a class of 18 candidates.

The best program, many believe, is simply bringing onto the board people who are already superb examples in their own world. Climbing the leadership ladder within Beth El is right and proper, but no match for the chief operating officer of a city center with a \$3.2 million budget. Or the organizer of a chain of furniture stores. Or president of a billion dollar manufacturing operation. Or principal in a leading law or PR firm.

Once they are captured by the passion of governing their temple, they find time to rise to its highest office.

1997 survey results

Charlotte area Jews are fortunate to have religious choices. It isn't New York, but Jewish families do have the ability to select from among activities, synagogues, schools, locations and traditions.

That accounts for the steady and healthy growth of our community. It is no secret that Temple Beth El, Temple Israel, Chabad and other congregations look to each other's members for financial and leadership support. And get it.

Solicitation of funds is active across all denominational lines. The Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, and all the branches on its tree, attract dollars from all synagogues, the unaffiliated, non-Jews and businesses. Endowment funds grow from fragile beginnings to impressive power that provides help to Jewish institutions so they are not entirely dependent on the changing fortunes of generous individuals.

So when we stand back and look at all that is Temple Beth El, we are seeing the cooperative spirit of the total Jewish community.

That community looked at itself closely in November, 1997. The Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte published a Community Study chaired by Sara Schreibman working with Richard J. Osborne, President, and Marvin A. Goldberg, Executive Director. The 67-page report was the product of Dr. Ira M. Shaskin

of the University of Miami. The purpose was to reckon with the impact of intermarriage, social services, the Jewish Day School and the Federation itself. The timing was vital because the Jewish population had doubled to 10,640 persons and seemed destined for even more intense growth.

Temple Beth El figured in the survey results in several ways. Forty-seven percent of Charlotte Reform Jews said they give to Federation compared to 68% of Conservative Jews. Forty percent identified themselves as Reform, 26% Conservative, 2% Orthodox and 32% Just Jewish. Slightly more than half of Charlotte Jews are not members of a synagogue. (That reality was validated years earlier when editors of the Hadassah telephone directory doubled their coverage and circulation by seeking out 500 unaffiliated Jews.)

Temple Beth El takes pride in its outreach to interfaith families but the survey reported only 34% of children raised in Charlotte intermarriages are being raised Jewish. Compared to other Jewish communities, Charlotte has the highest intermarriage rate. Important to the future of Beth El is the report of a high percentage of Reform membership compared to low Conservative and low Orthodox membership.

The survey would have been more valuable had it encompassed the Jewish qualities of Charlotte homes.

Just how Jewish are the homes of Temple Beth El members? Are prayer books handy?

Is there a current Hadassah telephone directory next to the most-used phone? Are there pictures on the walls depicting family b'nei mitzvah observations? Are there mezuzot on the doorposts? Is at least one occupant comfortable with his or her knowledge of Hebrew? Are recent issues of the Beth El *Voice* and *The Charlotte Jewish News* at hand—and showing evidence of lively use? Are letters recently received from friends and relatives in Israel among incoming correspondence? Does the home have a list of e-mail addresses connecting it to Jews elsewhere? Do the cupboard and fridge contain religion-friendly foods, if not all Kosher? Indeed, is the kitchen kosher? Are trophies, awards and framed certificates proudly posted displaying religious achievements of the family? Do we see photos shot at Temple Beth El or other Jewish locations?

The strength and endurance of one's heritage begin in each home.

The wallet biopsy

The most dreaded words at Temple Beth El in its earlier days were *the finance committee*.

Money to support the struggling congregation was not easy to come by. Annual meetings to rescue Temple Beth El from worrisome debt drew healthy turnouts of devoted members. Dick Blumenthal displayed his leadership talents by combining heartfelt appeals with warnings of imminent fiscal failure. He would always contribute substantially but not before his commitments were matched by others. He started up the first endowment fund with a modest \$2,500 so others could sniff at that sum while adding to it.

Board meetings were the site of painful discussions about the financial capabilities of members. One by one the names of each Beth El member went under the microscope. One would hear such things as, "He can afford season tickets to the Charlotte Symphony but hasn't signed a pledge card this year." One unforgettable quote: "What does he think this is, a charitable institution?"

The wallet biopsy was considered necessary for Beth El to stay alive. Board members did not escape board analysis of their own fiscal capability. They divvied up names of delinquent donors and agreed to make personal contacts. Failing that, the board would assume the identity of The Finance Committee and summon certain members to appear, explain their fiscal failures and successes and await decisions as to whether their membership could continue unchanged. Some families dropped out of religious circulation, never to return. Too often the dropout rationale was heard: “We don’t believe in organized religion.” Some even reappeared as members of local churches and no longer wished to be known as Jews. “We have one of your families in our congregation now,” was uttered by self-satisfied church members.

Our online presence

Temple Beth El keeps a fresh and broad presence online for new and seasoned computer owners. Subjects include Home, Calendar, Worship, Community, Lifelong Learning, Giving, About Us and Judaica Shop. It reaches out to people elsewhere planning to move to Charlotte, who have heard about Shalom Park and wonder how Temple Beth El fits in.

Other subjects can be found at JewishTouroftheCarolinas.org under Charlotte. They include our Holocaust Torah, American Freedom Bell, Harry Golden’s house and papers at UNC Charlotte, Arthur Goodman Park in Matthews, monument to the six million, stars of David on St. Peters, Hebrew Cemetery, Blumenthal Cancer Center, David Nabow, John Belk’s donation to Israel and Beth El’s Soviet protest.

As early as October, 2003, UAHC/URJ was claiming a huge win with its online information sources. Emily Grotta reported, “It was only eight years ago that the Union established the Reform Movement’s web site, but we are light years away from how we envisioned we would use this technology. More than 70,000 individuals access the UAHC’s web site each month...”

Our regional relations and financial shock

Getting along with regional offices of the Union for Reform Judaism can be smooth or rocky, a delightful marriage or a stormy relationship.

After all, temples and URJ absolutely must get along. So it is the duty of continually changing leadership at both levels to work harmoniously, productively and seamlessly. Things have been pretty good between Temple Beth El and the Washington, DC, regional office of UAHC/URJ over 66 years.

Relations could have been better. Like the union having to referee a bitter battle over Rabbi Gerber’s behavior that led to the Beth Shalom breakoff. And TBE facing suspension for non-payment of dues.

When word got around that Beth El was in trouble with UAHC over failure to pay dues, Arthur Kramer told members it was all a misunderstanding over numbers and that Beth El was up-to-date and in good standing.

It took three top officers to bite the bullet and level with the congregation. Read these excerpts from

their February, 2004, letter entitled, “Financial report to the congregation,” to all congregants and signed by Larry Farber, President; Fred Dumas, President-Elect, and Jonathan Howard, Treasurer:

“This letter is to update you on the state of the Temple’s financial affairs, in light of recent major developments regarding staffing, fundraising and other issues.

“For the last year a great deal of our energy was spent on completing our senior rabbi search and then working to meet the needs of the congregation with a reduced professional staff. But another major effort—balancing the Temple’s budget and eliminating our long-term debt load—has been under way for some time, and is of equal if not greater importance.

“As recently as July, 2002, Temple Beth El had an aggregate debt of more than \$400,000 which had been accumulated over the previous fifty years (sic). This included a balance on our line of credit and loans against our endowment. It also reflected past due obligations to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, our national governing body which provides valuable services for members, such as assisting with our rabbinic search and national and international advocacy for the Reform movement. The board took several measures to pay down the debt:

“*Raised \$100,000 in pledges, anchored by a generous one-time gift from an anonymous donor.

“*Raised \$25,000 from congregants who had been paying minimum or no dues.

“*Participated in the unprecedented ‘One for All’ fundraiser last spring which netted Temple Beth El \$200,000.

“As a result of these efforts, we reduced our overall debt load by 75% and *are now current with UAHC for the first time in many years.* (Italics ours)

“Operating shortfalls have been the major reason for the increase of the Temple’s debt...We were hit hard by the economic recession, which caused our interest income and revenue streams to be smaller than expected. The result was a \$50,000 operating deficit for the year.

“The board is determined to eliminate budget deficits and to build a solid financial foundation for the future, using long-range planning, sound management* and broad-based support...But unfortunately, these efforts will not be enough. We anticipate the need to increase congregational dues to make up the difference—the first time since 2002** that this has been necessary...The board will provide regular reports to you on our progress...”

That was 2004. President Adam Bernstein reported to all congregants in his Annual Report of 2007-2008 that one highlight of the year had been “completion of a first-ever financial audit.” Let us hope future presidents continue this standard practice without waiting another 64 years.

Still and all, UAHC/URJ leaders like Rabbi Dick Sternberger kept relations positive and pleasant for many good years. There was always a seat open for Temple Beth El at the Union’s regional table, and a goodly number of Charlotte people occupied it, even to the point of one Beth El member being president of the region.

* No mention of protection against mismanagement of funds ** Just two years earlier:

The long haul

In the early years of Temple Beth El, traveling from towns outside Charlotte was tougher before roads improved. Two hours each way was not unusual for Sabbath services, religious school and board meetings. Thus Charlotte members got to know fellow Jews from Hickory, Statesville, Monroe, Rock Hill, Mount Gilead, Lincolnton and Salisbury.

In my years traveling the Mid Atlantic Region of UAHC/URJ, I found one congregation that made sure money and power could never clash. This unnamed mountain temple was owned not by the members or its elected leaders but by a tight group of folk who made sure their congregation never fell into “the wrong hands.”

If anyone stood between them and their temple, they had the power to close it down—turn off the water and power and padlock the door. Worked for them.

It wasn't oneg Shabbat without our signature tablecloths

For half a century our social hall tables were covered with specially made tablecloths bearing signatures of members who contributed to a Sisterhood project. Forty-four religious school youngsters of long ago signed their names for posterity to view as a step-and-repeat pattern of giant blue signatures silk-screened onto a white field.

Here are those names in ABC order. You might well recognize some as children or adults:

Connie Bernstein, Alan Blumenthal, Victor Burg, Eddie Finman, Trude Finman, Stuart Fligel, David Fuerstman, Joan Fuerstman, Leland Fuerstman, Barbara Glazier, Bobby Glazier, Ronnie Goodman, Allen Hirsch, Freddie Hirsch, Annette Hurwitz, Bari King, Judy King, Richard Klein, Judy Lavinson, Robert Lavinson, Jimmy Madalia, Norma Madalia, Jimmy Maer, Betsy Melasky, Jane Melasky, Ande Susan Mitchell, Gwen Neiman, Patty Packard, Lois Raff, Buddy Resnik, Billy Ronay, Terry Seibert, Sally Sherwood, Suzanne Silverman, Gay Slesinger, Jackie Slesinger, Sidney Smith, Stephen Sobell, David Sternberg, Jenel Stewart, Jill Stewart, Jonathan Wallas, Philip Wallas and Nancy Ann Zimmerman.

And in closing

You know who you are

You would never dream of asking for or accepting one thin dime from Temple Beth El.

Instead you give hard-earned money to your religious family to the point of wondering where it's all coming from. You never begrudge the high professionals who devote their lives to serving our temple because you appreciate that it could not function without them.

But you? You could not live with yourself if you accepted pay for all you do or did. You know every time you enter Temple Beth El that it exists because of you, a person who gives as well as receives. You pitch in to do big and little things—helping people who don't have it in them to ask for help, rescuing the lost, warming relations that have cooled, noticing the neglected, picking things up when people can no longer reach them, giving encouragement where hope is the only medicine.

There is a name for you: *volunteer*. One of the kindest things you do is not to criticize or ridicule those who can't follow your example. You may even be rewarded with a title like usher or committee chair or president. But being called a volunteer is really quite enough for you.

When the reality of God is questioned, you are the answer.

Doom or boom?

How long will Temple Beth El last? What does its future look like?

While some congregations in this part of America are surviving and thriving, others are not. In North Carolina the Goldsboro, Rocky Mount, Lumberton and Weldon congregations folded. Members of more than a few synagogues, no longer viable, are predicting the end of their Jewish communities. Statesville is struggling because of competition from two Lake Norman congregations, Hickory as well, even Winston-Salem. Children and grandchildren have moved away. Whole industries have tanked, like textiles where Jewish executives abounded. Countless older leaders are still around, but only in cemetery silence.

When you live long, as Elizabeth and I have, you begin to sense the pulsating rhythm of time. You remember great buildings rising only to witness them being torn down. Families grow and fade. Whole populations—Jews, blacks, Hispanics, Catholics, Muslims—seep or flood in and out, changing our skyline, our economy, our dreams. Births and deaths, joys and tragedies ebb and flow like ocean waves. Our only control is inwardly to assign emotions to these life events as they happen—a heartbreak here, a celebration there, perhaps just a shrug. As we build a new temple, or expand an old one, we are eminently aware that civilizations are built on the remnants and ashes of the previous.

As I examine the 21 family trees I maintain, I watch some branches stop cold while others warmly blossom. Jewish birthrates are level or low, giving frightening substance to Hitler's goal of ending the world's Jewish presence altogether. The Large Jewish Family is generally a thing of the past. (See: "Large Muslim Family.")

Measures of success

Temple Beth El is consistently crowded.

That is one huge truth. You can visit cavernous synagogues coast-to-coast that stay nearly empty day after day, month after month. But Temple Beth El in Charlotte, North Carolina, brings 'em in.

The magic is there, a beautiful harmony of rabbi and organization and tradition of success. It's not show business; it's God's business. Interfaith families are not rejected or censured. Rather they are the very heart of the congregation, its *raison d'être*.

When Rabbi Judy came to Charlotte and Temple Beth El, one of her great strengths lay in her wise management of funerals and bereavement. When she was voted in as reigning rabbi, she polished her proficiencies until they shined from all aspects. She grew from five feet to ten.

The quality of temple leadership developed from I'll-try-it-for-a-year to I'd-give-anything-for-the-opportunity. The board gained levels of vision and wisdom unseen in its six decades. Mistakes? Big ones. But there was never the mistake of getting fat and comfortable. They say God can't exist without people any more than people can exist without God. Happily both are enjoying one another's company at Temple Beth El.

Champion of minority rights

Attorney Mickey Aberman, Temple Beth El's recording secretary, recommends we look squarely at minority rights when we face our future.

Civilization struggles through the ages so that the principle of majority rule might prevail. Twice in its history our congregation faced division, one of them profound. In both cases the minority lost out.

It is said that a large number of the 700 churches and synagogues in Mecklenburg County were born of disputes. How old must a person be to be baptized? Should our minister continue serving or be sent packing? Do our services serve our congregation?

Wars are often the result of minority people breaking away from majority nations. Only the velvet revolution—when the Czech and Slovak people decided peacefully to become separate countries—stands as a wise and honorable solution to minority rights.

We have lawyers to settle disputes for the good of all parties. Too often legal counsel is called in too late to change negative to positive. The Charlotte Jewish community can be grateful to attorneys who have led them through their history, like Mark Bernstein, Arthur Goodman and Zeb Vance. Bernstein put the J together. Goodman put Beth El together. Vance put North Carolina together.

In temples, as in arithmetic, the opposite of multiplication is division. To assure and secure the future of our beloved temple, we will stay together if we keep wise counsel at our right hand.

The future of our past

Where is Temple Beth El to go with its heritage? Will it continue its rocky ride into a future too busy to spend time and money to appreciate its past?

Our nascent leadership is alive and well, but in what direction is it headed?

No one less than the head of URJ told us as the year 2009 began that we need to consider bringing Reform and Conservative branches back together to find a stable and effective future, slashing our investments in professional training and real estate and putting the money into building a learned Jewish peoplehood.

In short, why study our past if our future plan is endangered? The Jewish population—national and world--is threatened. Not by incipient Hitlers but by ourselves who consider a dynamic birth rate to be unrealistic and unreachable. Quality, not quantity, is the fashionable Jewish destiny of the 21st century--while the Muslim tide floods the earth.

On November 12, 2008, I recommended to Amy Lefkof five serious programs to give our past a future:

1. Stage observations of the lives of historic Beth El heroes twice each year on *Sabbaths of Memories*. Example: Assemble Beth El members on opening day on a March Shabbat morning at Arthur Goodman Memorial Park in Matthews. This event is already set up by the Matthews Athletic & Recreation Association to honor hundreds of young baseball players, with pep talks by the mayor, the monsignor of “our” church, kids who have grown to become sports stars, and descendants of Arthur Goodman who donated the acreage to MARA with an annual budget of \$905,000.
2. On the *yahrzeits* of famous people connected with Temple Beth El arrange *programs honoring their achievements in life*. These could include Alex Schindler, Herman and Dick Blumenthal, former rabbis no longer living, and former officers no longer living.
3. *Name more rooms, halls, buildings and roads for past Beth El heroes* too soon forgotten. This should not be seen as an opportunity to raise funds for plaques but a way of reminding ourselves daily of great people of our past who gave more than money.
4. Enlist surviving members to *come to our pulpit to give first-person accounts* of historic events in the temple’s past—people like Robert Schrader telling of his bar mitzvah, the first in Beth El history, Fay Green and Trudy Packard describing early covered dish suppers and rummage sales which were the temple’s fundraisers, and Hilbert Fuerstman reenacting selections from his theatrical musical productions.
5. If we can seriously honor adults by blowing out candles on their birthday cakes as if they were children, Temple Beth El can get some depth by reliving its historic moments, *protecting its priceless artifacts and archives, and reporting chapters of the story of its own life in every issue of The Voice*.

Elizabeth

I saved the dedication of this book until last, first to honor the memories of our family who died before us: Pauline Stein Klein, Jacob Klein, Katherine Cohen Goodman, Arthur Goodman, Janice Klein Schlosser, Arthur Goodman, Jr., and our little lost son.

Next it is dedicated to my wife Elizabeth Hofeller Goodman Klein. She proofed, corrected, suggested and thought out this work as she did my previous writings since our June 17, 1945, wedding at the Charlotte Woman's Club.

After reading *The Bridge Table*, you may have noticed that our romance coincided with the birth of Temple Beth El, and continues neatly throughout this congregation's first 66 years. So you see, Elizabeth and I have things in common—actually twenty things we have discovered that continue to surprise us.

Elizabeth is one of those special people in Charlotte who was—you ready for this?—born here. As were all of our children and most of our grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

I think it's fitting that this work opens and closes with words about our life and love, like, well, the covers of a book.

To celebrate the 60th anniversary of our chance meeting, I got the Charlotte Park and Recreation Department to rent the whole building where Elizabeth and I found each other December 25, 1944: the Charlotte Armory Auditorium. We danced alone to Artie Shaw CDs for an hour or so. Same boy. Same girl. Same dance floor. Same songs. It was nice.

To me Elizabeth, Lib, Liz, Libby—she answers to them all—represents countless quiet heroes in the long life of Temple Beth El. She has listened to my river of lectures like a doting mother. It was many years before I heard her own public talks, when she was president of Charlotte Hadassah, and discovered what a fine speaker she is.

She has worked quietly behind the scenes at Temple like so many others. She says Anita Blumenthal was like that, and so she was, but so, too, is my wife. She has always been one of those *rara avis* people who say *yes* first and then ask for the details. Like hosting eight exchange students and boat people in our home, all for a year or more.

That she remains my partner in the expansion of our family to 24, experienced half a century of motion picture production and advertising life, sixty-some overseas trips and loss of our third son at birth, is truly remarkable to me. And so I thank her, with all my heart.

To me she is and always will be the personification of the meaning of love.

*

This is a proper place and time to express thanks to Adonai and to all those who made wonderful things happen that became the realities of this story--dear people, of many places and times, many of whom will never meet except on these pages, but who had the same open minds and hearts that nourished Temple Beth El.

Illustrations



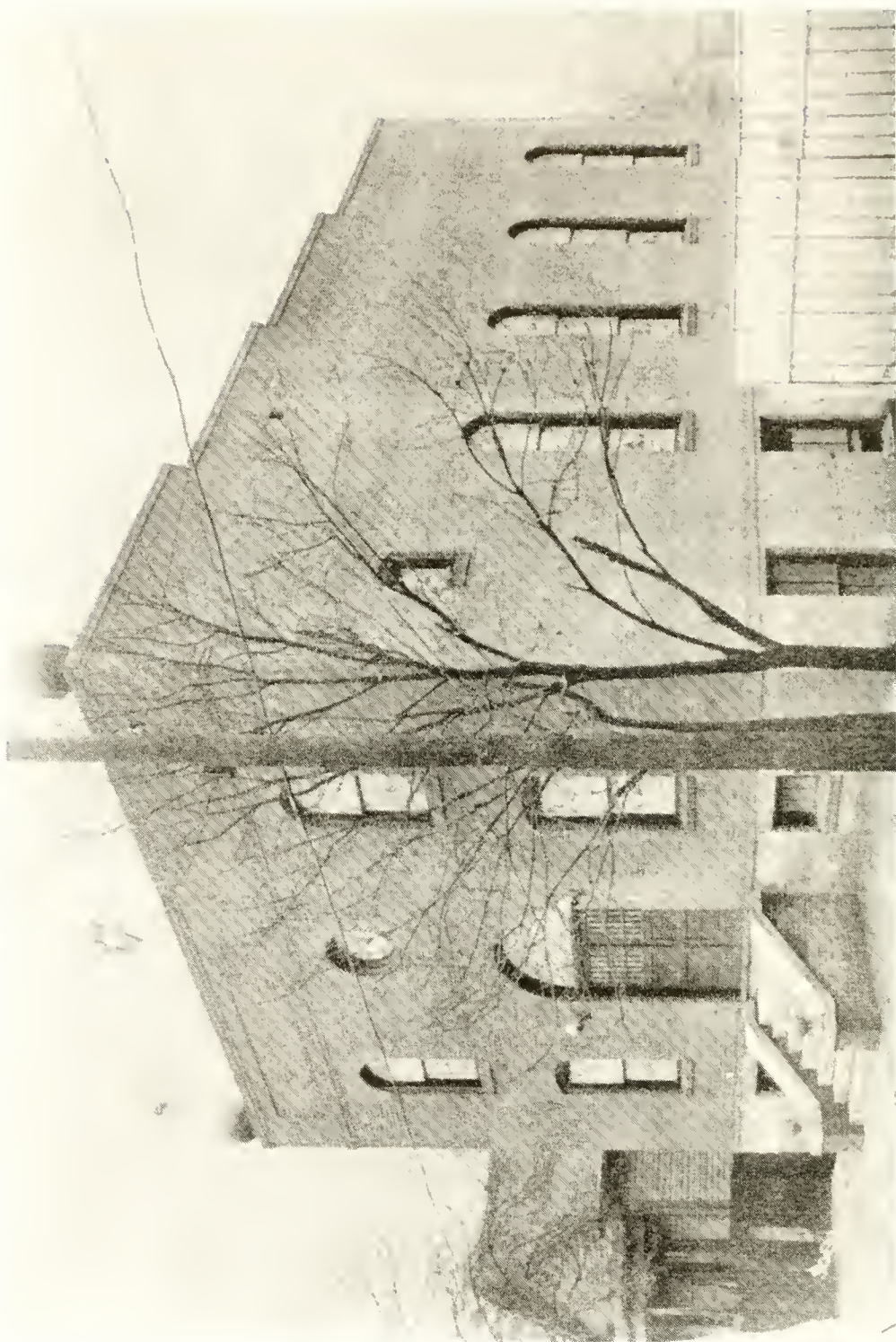
Anita and Herman Blumenthal, newly wedded to each other and to Temple Beth El



Arthur Goodman, Jr., at 16 the acting rabbi at the first services of Temple Beth El



Where Temple Beth El's first services were held: Hotel Charlotte



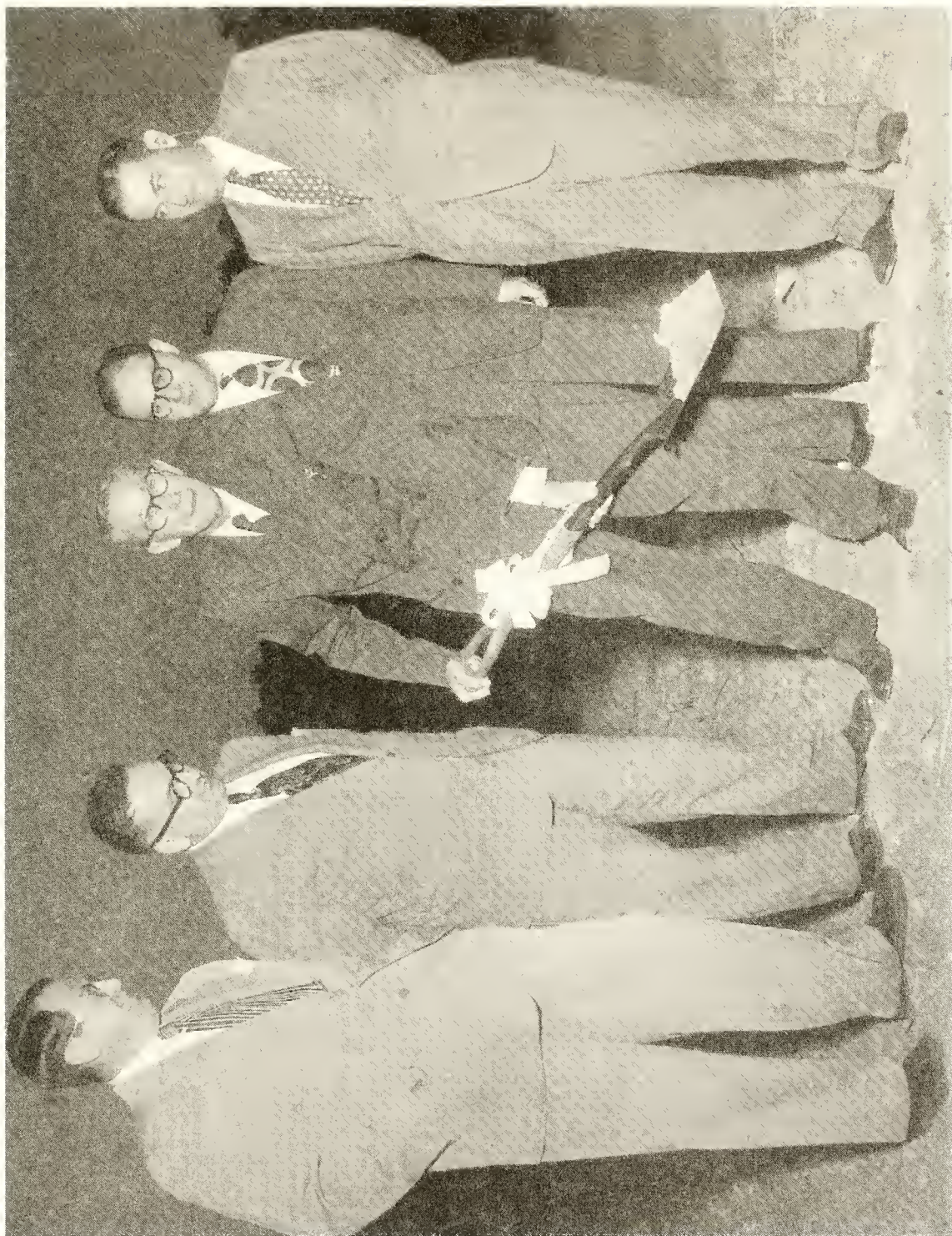
Charlotte's first Jewish sanctuary: Hebrew United Brotherhood on Seventh Street



Four windows over Downton's Foodstore mark the second home of this congregation



Still standing at Charlotte's air terminal is the original Morris Field chapel where Temple Beth El Rabbi Philip Frankel preached on Shabbat evenings before leading services uptown



*Five Beth El leaders break ground for their first sanctuary:
Harry Frohman, Harry Golden, Leo Gottheimer, Rabbi Philip Frankel and Sonny Melasky*



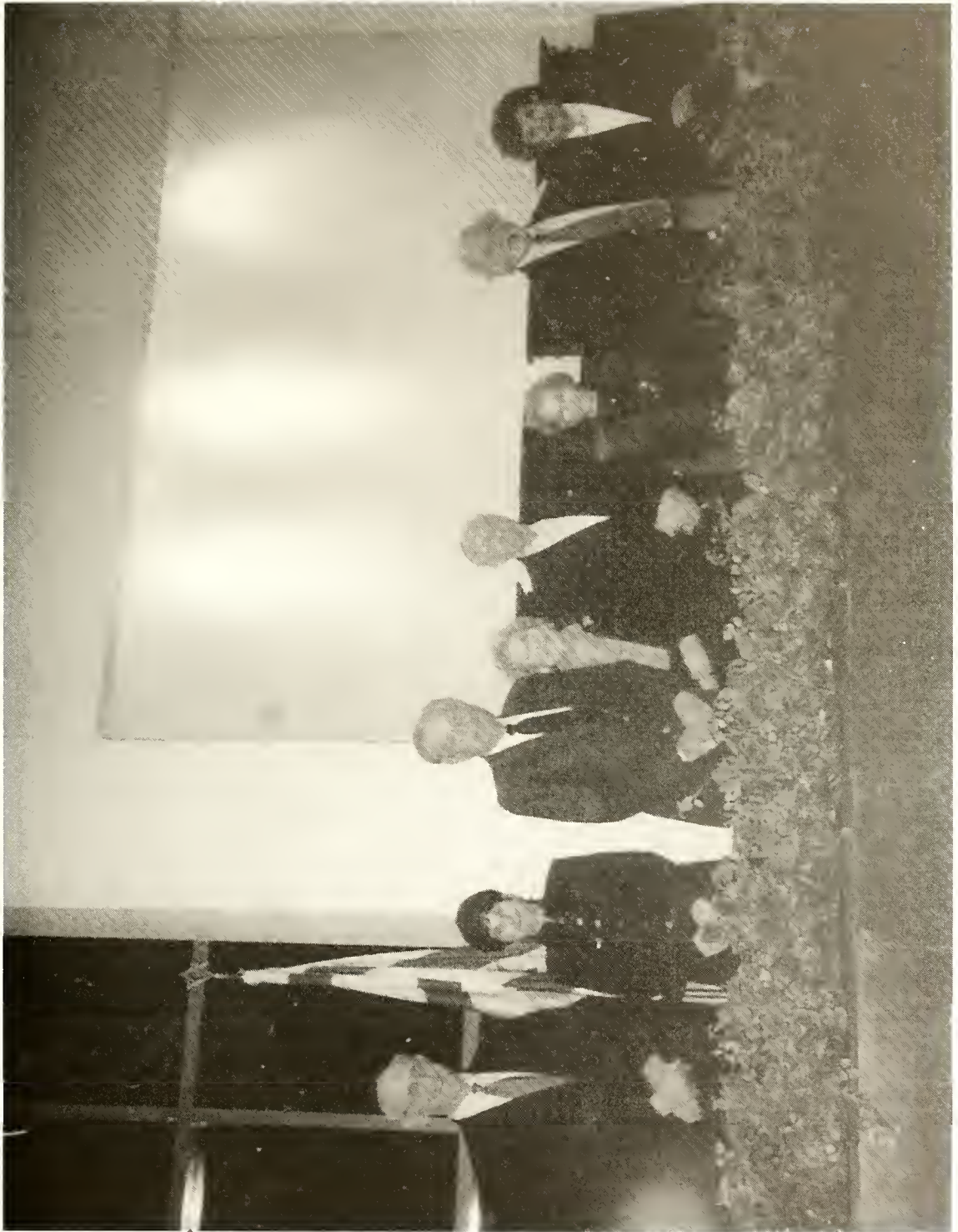
As oldtimers remember the first Temple Beth El



First Sisterhood picture: Selma Melashy, Phyllis Frohman and Irene Madalia



*Early Sisterhood photo: Gladys Lavitan, Charlotte Glazier,
Ellen Helfgott, Anita Blumenthal and Irene Madalia*



*Sha'arit ha'anashim: the last photo of the remnants of the Beth El founding families.
 Mark Bernstein, Jane Melasky Diamond, Paul Stewart, Frudy Packard, Robert Schrader,
 Gladys Lavitan, Arthur Goodman, Jr., and Elizabeth Goodman Klein*



Gladys Laontan

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S. SCHLESINGER

BOOK II
Fifth Edition

1929

THE JEWISH BOOK CONCERN
BLOCH PUBLISHING COMPANY
NEW YORK

Earliest Sabbath music book used by TBE choir



Our temple's first wedding, that of Hilda Malever and Raymond Kirsner, October 5, 1950



*From generation to generation: eighth president Manny Packard and son Billy proudly hold Torahs on the Beth Sh' bimah during Sukkot, 1958, ceremonies.
The Packard family gave the congregation one of its scrolls.*



Herman and Anita Blumenthal in the best of times



How many rabbis can you spot in this Beth El crowd at Wildacres?

HILBERT FUERSTMAN STILL SWINGING AFTER 80 YEARS!

PRESENTED BY
THE DILWORTH
TENNIS GROUP
MAY 10, 2001

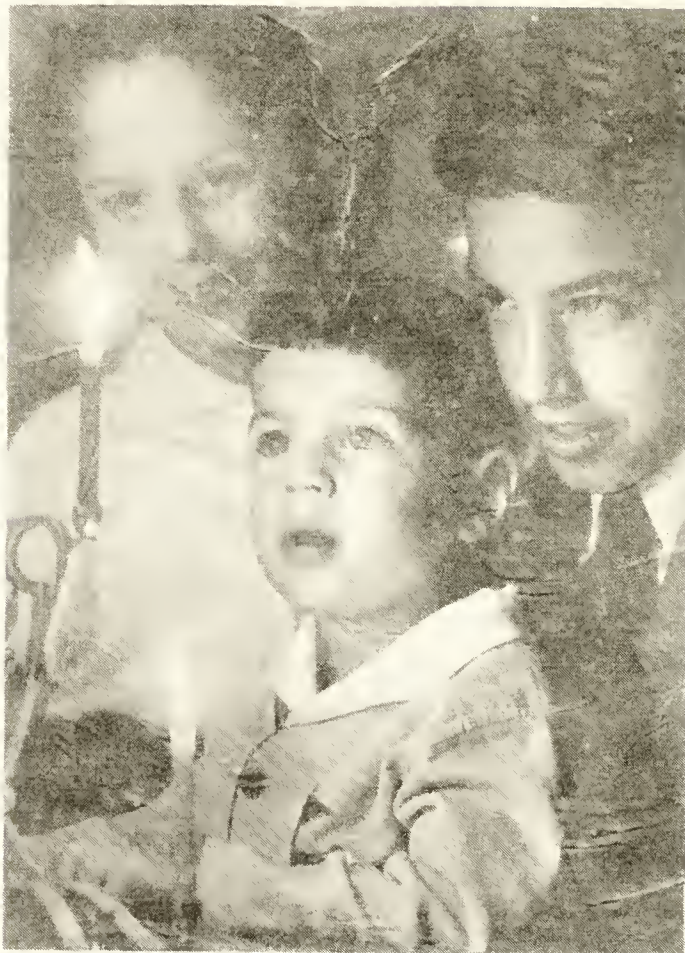
A way of remembering Hilbert Fuerstman



Elizabeth and Walter Klein with Rabbi Alexander Schindler

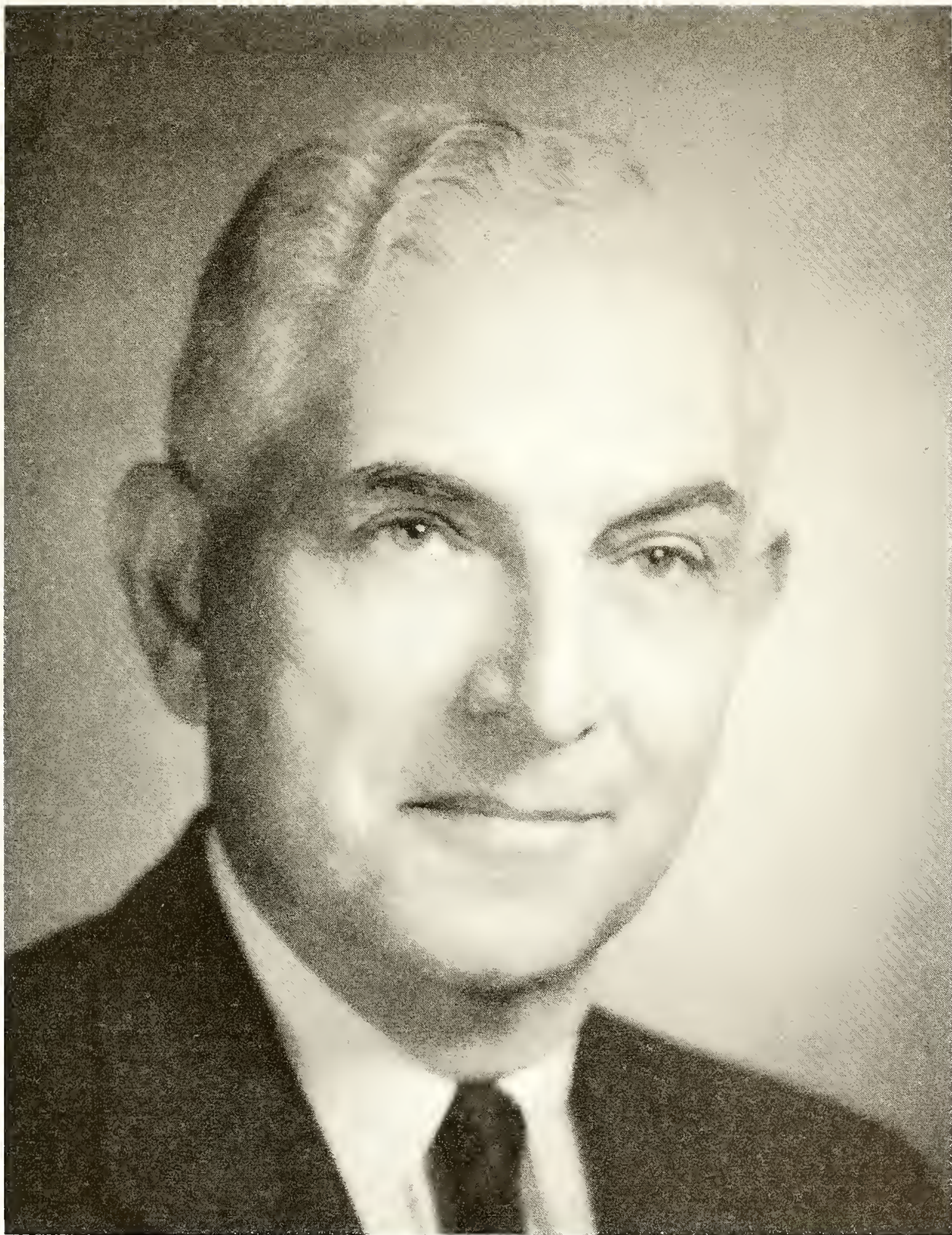
CHINESE 957
Vol. VII, No. 2

American Judaism



4. [redacted] - [redacted] Amer. Hebrew Congregation & Affiliated Nations [redacted] sister - [redacted]
[redacted] Brother-Kids National Federation of Teen-Age Youth, [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]

Only cover of American Judaism magazine featuring TBE children



When David Nabow died, the president of Duke Power could not go on without him



Entire Hebrew Union College Cincinnati faculty and overseers officers



Temple Beth El and Temple Israel members in Washington in force to demonstrate with 250,000 others against Soviet oppression of its Jewish people



*Father Edward Flannery of Seton Hall University came here to speak to us
about his mission to bring Jews and Catholics together in harmony*



*Treasures come in special forms like this 45rpm disc,
"Anita (Blumenthal) Sings Again"*

Cloudy

Cool

High, 68; Low, 45

More Weather Data On Page 2A

The Charlotte

Foremost Newspaper

86th Year — No. 30

FRIDAY, A



Robert W. Blumenthal Chats With Robert Bernhardt
He's Holding Torah, The Scroll Containing Bible's First 5 Books

Observer Photo by Bill McCallister

Jewish Congregation Moves In With Baptists

Some 2,000 Jews and Christians turned

Charlotte Observer front page of April 23, 1971, telling how Beth Shalom moved into Myers Park Baptist Church. Shown are Robert Blumenthal, Robert Bernhardt, Pastor Eugene Owens and Dr. Jack Lavitan

HOLDS Scott For

Reportedly Expresses Concern

By ALLAN SLOAN

Observer Staff Writer

Gov. Bob Scott held a private meeting with members of the State Utilities Commission last week and, according to people who were at the meeting, told the commissioners he was worried that three major electric companies in the state were not getting enough money.

The meeting was held a week ago Thursday in the governor's office, and was attended by him, the commissioners, Roy Sowers, director of the Conservation & Development Department.

The Observer questioned some of the participants in the meeting, but they all refused to be quoted on the record, saying that all comment had to come from the governor. None denied that the meeting had taken place.

Scott was in Washington, D.C., Thursday and could not be reached for comment. But participants in the meeting gave this account:



*Temple Beth El bar-mitzvah Mel Cohen, Morganton mayor;
probably holding that office longer than any other in NC history*



Rabbi Jacob Rader Marcus



*St. Peter's Protestant Episcopal Church at 115 West 7th street displays two Stars of David over its entrance doors as its way of honoring its debt to Judaism in the founding of the Christian faith.
FBE helped restore the falling stars*



*Fay Green and Edna Ferster got their first big break in show biz
starring in Way Off Broadway shows on the Temple Beth El stage*



Eugene Owens, pastor of Myers Park Baptist Church, host of Congregation Beth Shalom and long-time friend of Temple Beth El and the Jewish people



FBE presidents and rabbis are remembered with portraits on the walls of ancillary meeting rooms



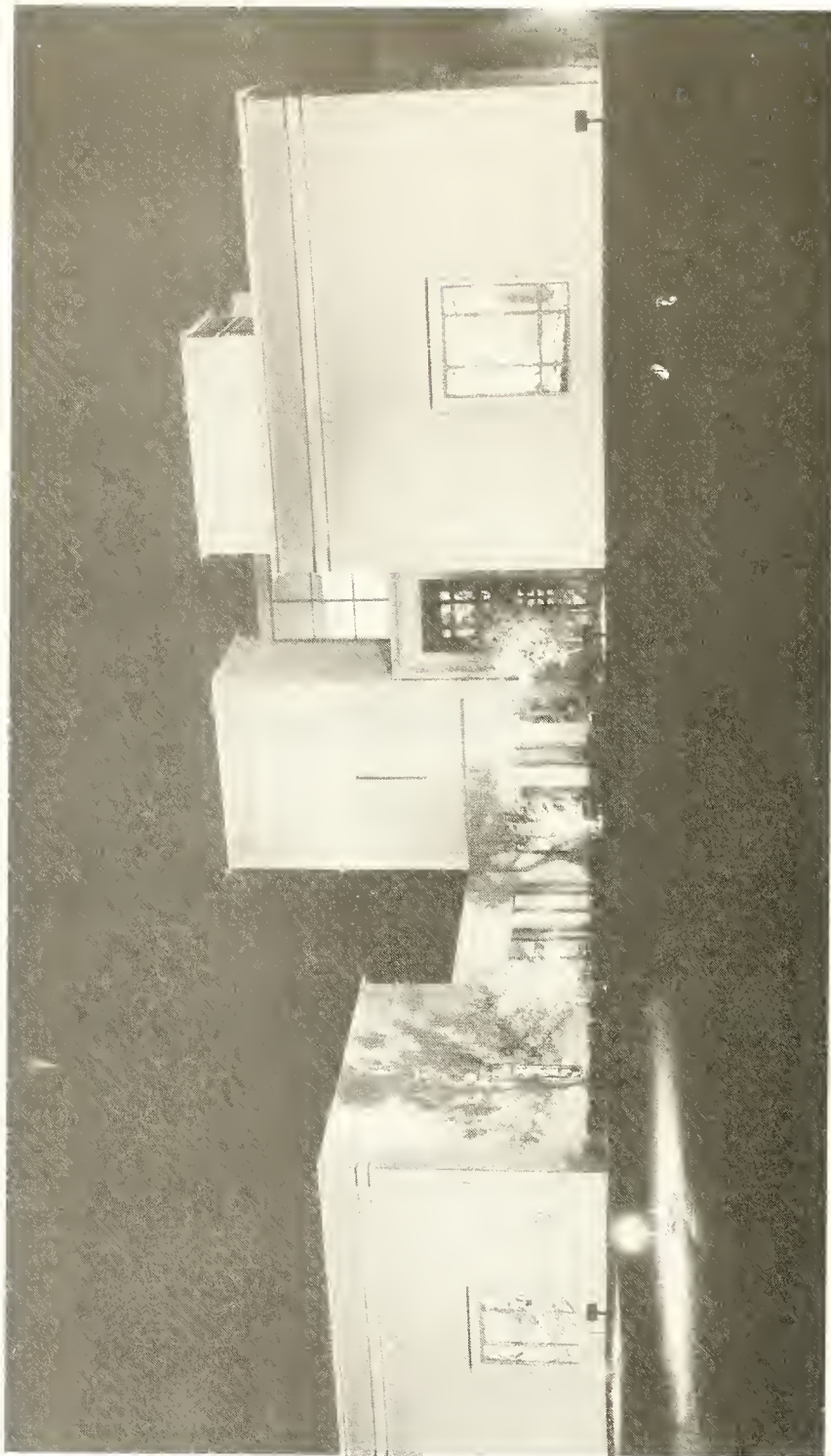
Scene representing half a century of Temple Beth El retreats at Wildacres includes Rabbis Jim Bennett and Judy Schindler, one guitar and assorted mountains



The faces and music change but the Temple Beth El choir goes on forever



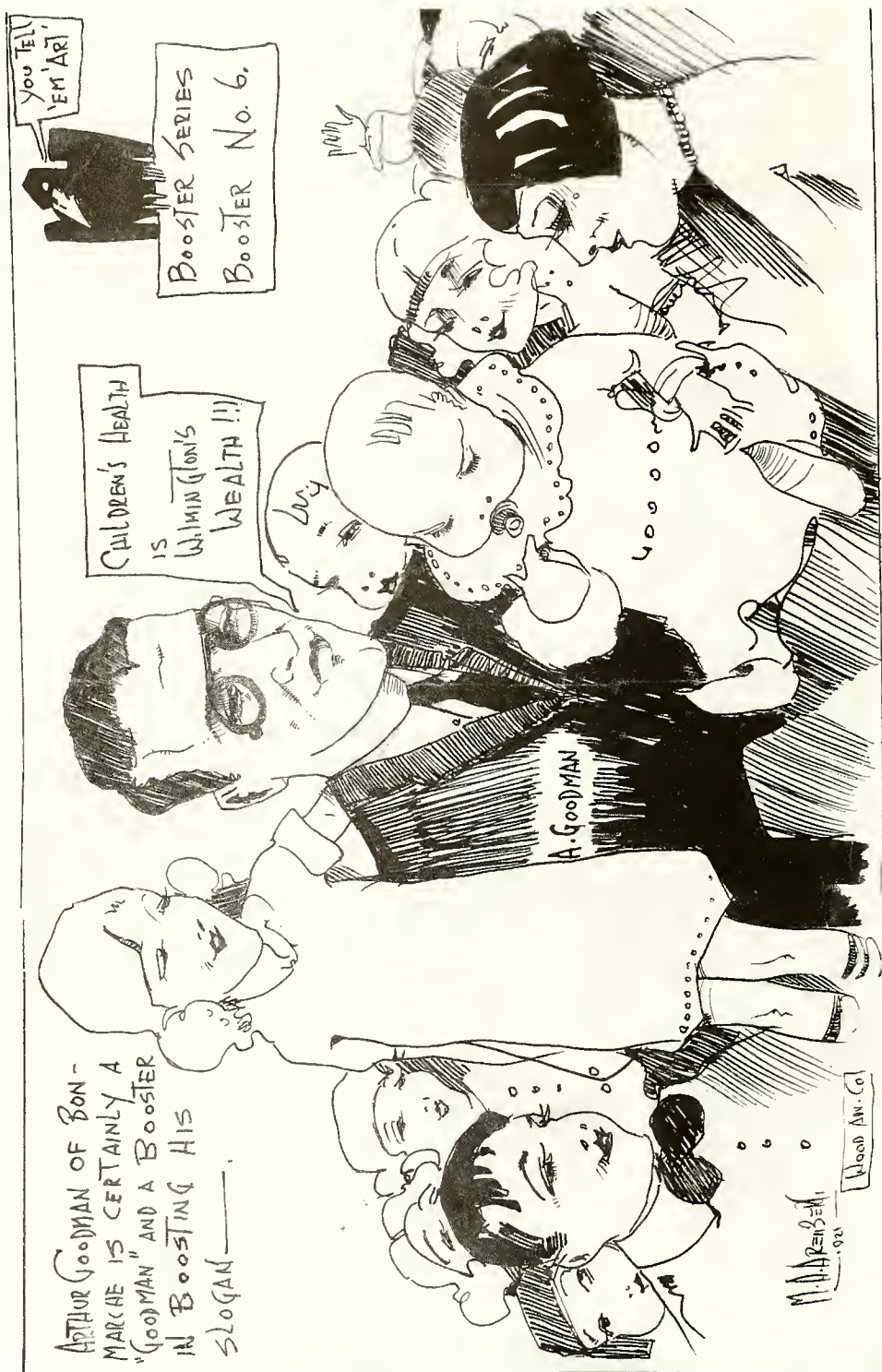
All thirteen Jewish Confederate soldiers from Charlotte were finally honored in the historic ceremony pictured here. Remarkably, the grandson of Captain Julius Roessler, the highest ranking soldier, lived to pose for the dedication of the monument to those thirteen Jewish heroes. The sunny Sunday event was crowded with Temple Beth El and Temple Israel members, leaders of the history community, Civil War reenactors, and Rabbi Murray Ezring and Cantor Elias Roochvarg, who conducted the service.



Temple Beth El in the beauty of night



Arthur Goodman



Original editorial cartoon published in the Wilmington (NC) Star-News honoring Arthur Goodman in 1921 as a Wilmington booster and for conceiving the slogan, "Children's health is Wilmington's wealth"



Katherine Cohen's 1911 Holy Scriptures, bound in white leather with gold-edged pages, her confirmation gift from Reform Temple Beth Zion of Buffalo.

Her mother Adella was confirmed there a generation earlier.

Katherine grew up to become the wife of Temple Beth El Founder Arthur Goodman



*Early photo of Dick Blumenthal among friends in the Charlotte Jewish community.
He is number 22 in the back row of the black tie affair of April 1, 1929*

